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Mary Mirrilles

Mary Mirrilles :: By "Iota" (Mrs. Mannington Caffyn)



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MARY MIRRILIES

CHAPTER I

THE fragile, meek-eyed, tired woman at the head of the table went on patiently carving the leg of mutton.

The German Governess with the large unstable breast, the high aggressive brow, and the tenacity of purpose peculiar to her nation, who had been working steadily through soup and meat to an accompaniment of guttural though suppressed protest, now advanced squarely to the charge.

"Asparagus," she said, "is to-day sixpence the bundle. In Germany during all the months of the spring it is the everyday dish of the most humble. For complexion and stomach alike is this delicate vegetable indispensable."

Even in the days of her prosperity the lady who helped the vegetables had a sound soldier-heart, and since Ella, her old pupil, had undertaken foreign governesses—rapacious creatures without bowels—she had made it a rule to look even more warlike than she felt during working hours. Seeing now the pale flush that mounted to the very roots of Ella's white hair she became reckless.

"May I help you to greens, Miss Engelhardt?" she rapped out. "Their effect both upon stomach and complexion cannot be beaten."

"Their effect upon my stomach only too well do I know. May I be permitted a little bread?"

She devoured a substantial portion with sublime insolence and some real self-sacrifice, since she was pining

for meat which in England is succulent. This bucolic nation, although guiltless of culture, at least understands meat, and having a large mind Miss Engelhardt was always careful to do justice to the points of her inferiors. She was universal or nothing.

"I can quite understand," she said, her attentive, prominent eyes fixed upon the vanishing greens, "that this primitive vegetable should be your national dish. Asparagus is the food of the spiritually rich; one could hardly expect it here in any abundance."

"Well, no," said Miss Gaunt grimly. "Not at a guinea a week for bed, breakfast and a three-course dinner."

Miss Gaunt was by nature and training a Christian woman, but she suffered from the strength of mind engendered by too long a contact with the undesirables of all nations, and by this time all that could be seen of Ella was pale liver colour.

"Julia," quavered the little frail gentlewoman. She was now carving very delicately, lest the bone should expose itself naked and unashamed to the public eye, and to allow any visitor even to suspect that the joint was nearing its end would indeed have been a degradation. "Oh, Julia, remember—*we—we*—don't say these things."

"I shouldn't have said them," said Miss Gaunt, "if the fortunes of war hadn't forced us into such strange company. An alien microbe once admitted into any environment"—she paused to sniff—"it's difficult to escape infection."

There was something of the diplomat wrapped up within the warrior in Miss Gaunt and many stricken years of the foreign governess had taught her to veil her irony; quite delicately enough for the strange tribe which now infested the premises of Ella.

Miss Engelhardt, although only imperfectly understanding, glared. Superior education, however, having given her perfect control over her whole being, she switched off her mind and her emotions from asparagus and the preponderance of the German nation, to a careful choice between the two excellent puddings now emitting their

fragrance under her fine aquiline nose, finally deciding in favour of canary pudding.

Miss Vynne helped her with pathetic alacrity. She was fairly thrilling with joy that only this very week she had substituted the recipe of her great-aunt for the far more economical one of Miss Gaunt, and had ordered Gorgonzola cheese instead of the usual excellent but unexciting Canadian Cheddar.

It was the perennial pleasure of Miss Vynne to do the marketing on Fridays when dear Julia was obliged to sit on a Committee for the relief of indigent gentle-women. The expression on Julia's face at the Friday dinners was often indeed a trial, but Miss Vynne had grown quite used to resignation, and she wished now that she had ventured a little farther and in addition to the Gorgonzola had ordered asparagus. It would probably be at a prohibitive price next Friday. Such was always the luck of this poor lady.

The drawing-room to which the ladies mounted to consume their coffee was another painful pleasure to the little lady of the house. It was the pale echo of her former home, producing in painted panels and textures faded by art the polished oak and the lovely hues of time of the old stone Manor house on the breezy heights of the Cotswolds. There for long generations her fathers had reigned and had given with both hands.

It belonged now to the corn merchant who had once served them.

Ella was all for relinquishing everything to the creditors with a meek heart and a broken spirit, Miss Gaunt, however, at the very point of the sword, saved her bedroom and her drawing-room for the poor little outcast and then faithfully followed her fortunes.

Julia Gaunt was then in the prime of her own years: the pick of scholastic appointments were gaping for her, and there was a wonderful hope ahead of her that was to have materialized that very month. But no one but Miss Gaunt and one other ever knew this.

And now she and her old pupil entertained Home and

Foreign Governesses at popular prices. Had she had her own way with them little Miss Vynne would have been friend and benefactor to the whole motley crew, and have languished long before her time in the work-house. Miss Gaunt, however, made the concern pay. She gave good value for the money of her clients and was respected by the tradespeople within a radius of three miles. She, of course, would have preferred guests who could have paid properly, and Ella had a splendid connection all anxious to help, but to entertain as P.G.'s friends of the family would have put an end to Ella.

So once again did Miss Gaunt sacrifice her prospects and her inclinations. And Ella in some soft silken stuff, with old jewels at throat and wrist, and she as neat as wax in a tailor-made, went once or twice a month to Ella's old Club, and had tea there like the rest. And sometimes old friends recognizing them, came up and told them all about their husbands and children. Ella listened with all her heart and told nothing; and the memories of the comfortable are short, so hardly one of the old acquaintances, except in the vaguest way, realized that the last of the Vynnes kept governesses; and this to Ella was a source of the deepest consolation.

Often at slack times Miss Gaunt wished to goodness they did realize it, for with the amount of children they seemed to have produced and the annoyances apparently inseparable from their education, they must have dealt largely in governesses, many of them obviously undesirable and liable to change.

However, she would as soon have whipped Ella as have deprived her of her one little delusion, the only one left now, and she had always been content with such little ones!

Miss Gaunt had not neglected her duty, she had done her best to alter this,—to expand and deepen the imagination of Ella; but all in vain, so in the end she had accepted her as she was, a weaker vessel, to make the best of and to lavish her all upon.

CHAPTER II

HAVING drunk their coffee,—cups of it, the terms were inclusive and the coffee good,—glorified their respective nationalities, damned that of their hosts delicately or indelicately according to race, and practised English to their hearts' content, the guests withdrew to their lairs. Whereupon for a full minute the three left behind looked at each other.

The third, younger by countless years than the other two, had been watching the proceedings at dinner in silence, with wide eyes that, in an odd way, seemed to be dancing as light as moths over two wells of sorrow. She was deep-bosomed, tall and straight, and must have been very beautiful before her young face had become worn.

Now as she came and stood before the other two, looking down on them, her eyes stopped dancing for a minute.

"And so this is your life," she said, "and that's why you didn't want me or anyone else to come and stay with you. You might have had *me* at least."

Mary Mirrilles was very tall and fine. She looked like those who had everything, and Miss Vynne had grown so used to the hard judgment of those who had nothing, that she shrank back as though from a little blow. She found herself standing before the bar of an absolutely unaccustomed point of view, and she was an arrant coward before the unexpected in pain.

"It was all so different," she pleaded, "and you—oh! Mary—you see, dear," she said deprecatingly, "you were the very happiest little girl I have ever seen, and

one hates so to make happiness,—er—uncomfortable you know."

"I know," said Mary with an odd laugh, "it is horrid. I hate it myself. Still, I'm glad I forced myself upon you." She took hold of the chair the large German had just vacated, and carefully brushed it out with her pocket-handkerchief. "I want to get rid of her evil influence," she said, "but it's sure to be the most comfortable chair in the room."

She sat down quite at her ease, but as upright as a dart. For a long time now it would have been sheer recklessness on the part of Mary either to lie back or to loll, for now she had to eschew support and to strengthen her backbone.

"Miss Gaunt, do you get many like Behemoth?" said she. "The rest are harmless enough."

"It's a type that recurs, Mary, but she's its uttermost limit, thank God, and she's got a situation. She goes there in a week."

"But not to stay. You'll have her back before you can say 'knife.'"

"Yes," said Miss Gaunt. "She'll return."

"And I'm perfectly certain that Cousin Ella will give her asparagus as a welcome home. I see it in her eyes. I could always see the nicest things in your eyes, Cousin Ella, and they're as pretty as ever they were.—I suppose Behemoth's inevitable—but is it all inevitable?" Mary asked gently.

Cousin Ella was flushing and there were tears in her eyes. Mary's was the first little compliment she had had for years. Miss Gaunt had no time for compliments, and the foreign governesses no inclination.

Miss Gaunt put herself in the breach while Ella recovered her composure.

"The house is comfortable and in a good locality, and it pays fairly well," she said. "Ella would hate a shabby address, and she has many opportunities for kindness and more for forgiveness. The concern has its compensations, hasn't it, Ella?"

Ella murmured assent. She felt emotional and unequal to general conversation.

"The German plays like an angel," said Miss Gaunt.

"She'll have her asparagus all right!" said Mary, as she stood up to stroll round the pretty room.

"I think I remember everything in it," she said. "I used to love my visits to you, Cousin Ella."

"And I loved having you, my dear," said Ella, still emotional.

"I know you did. I gave you as many opportunities for kindness and forgiveness as Fräulein herself."

"Dear Mary—don't."

"I have always heard of you both as looking so nice and well-dressed," said Mary presently, "and you always wrote from your Club. I didn't realize the aliens,—and—somehow, I never write letters now."

She moved on, touching old friendly things, and she thought of the pretty girl in draped garments of neutral tints many years ago in the beautiful old house on the breezy heights, and, suddenly, other nearly-forgotten things came drifting back to her remembrance.

She saw, moving in and out of the rooms as though very much at home in them, a very splendid person, always ready to play with her, and to encourage her in her devilries. And she remembered the moments—in the twilight by flickering fires, when, much as she resented the necessity, she had to make herself scarce. For then as now, Mary liked being in events, and not standing alone without their gates, waiting, as she was doing now.

But this was not the time to return to *that*. She thrust it from her, and went up and down the spacious room, picking up the threads and piecing together the scattered shreds of the old story.

There was another person who came also to that house on the windy hills. He was less splendid than the other, and not so much at home ; but she loved him also, because he had hobnobbed with cannibals, and hoped to hobnob still more before he died, unless indeed they ate him up on sight, before any interchange of social amenities were

possible. This remote, though not improbable contingency had made him very real and precious to Mary. For the rest, he wore a high waistcoat and round collars: seemed rather afraid of people, and disinclined for play. She used to think that perhaps associating with cannibals had made him a little proud and haughty.

And now the shreds seemed to be falling into a pattern. Even to touch old things from the old hills where one has been happy all over is illuminating, for everything seems to hold a little lit lamp in its heart.

* * * * *

Once she had come back on a sudden visit to find Cousin Ella lovely instead of just pretty and the man rather a nuisance. He was never off the premises, and never now cared to play.

The other, on the contrary, whom she knew now to be a missionary, had grown less aloof and more reasonable. He could play well enough when prompted, and he was very biddable, but the magnificent initiative of the other could never be his.

Then the pattern came to an abrupt stop, leaving ragged edges. The men went and the women stayed, and the old story was told. The meek missionary went off to his cannibals. The splendid lover went off to a girl with money when Ella lost hers.

For a minute or so Mary forgot her own story, all red and bleeding in her heart, for this old one, the wounds of which, if they were not healed long ago, certainly ought to have been.

"I think I'll go to bed," said Mary. "Good-night, Cousin Ella."

"I remember it all now," she continued when Miss Gaunt came out to light her candle. "I'm glad I came here," she said with her gurgling laugh, pausing on the first step and shedding the light of the candle down on the little governess. "I think you know no end of things, and although Cousin Ella knows nothing except what you and the old story have told her, it makes her look

most awfully nice. It's only the people who've never had any story at all, who ever really bore you. One must suffer to be interesting, I suppose. And what a brick you've been!" said Mary, stooping suddenly to kiss the kind, keen, gnarled face looking up at her.

"My dear! That's all so long ago. It's only the present that matters now."

"Not to-night, though," said Mary. "The present might keep one awake. One can always go to sleep on the past, can't one? Tell me—you know all about everything."

"Yes," said Miss Gaunt cheerfully. "One sleeps sound on the past."

"Julia," said Cousin Ella nervously, when after a minute or so Julia came back. "She didn't tell us anything."

"There wasn't much time, my dear," said Miss Gaunt briskly.

"They don't need time," said Ella plaintively, "to get in all about their husbands and children.. They can compress volumes into a minute—not that I don't like to listen to them, Julia. You know I do—but Mary never mentioned hers."

"That will come. You may have too much of them before you've finished with Mary."

"But, dearest Julia, don't you think——?"

"I'm incapable of thinking, child. Let us go to bed."

"She's very white."

"So are you, as white as death. Now, Ella, just keep your mind off husbands and children. You're the last person in the world to deal with such ticklish things at the dead of night, for of all created beings they call for the full light of day upon them."

"Mary——"

"In spite of husbands and sons or because of them Mary has blossomed out into a very fine woman. Good-night, dear. Sleep well."

Miss Gaunt watched the spent grace of the fragile figure as it trailed in its little resigned way up the stairs.

"Let her rest while she can," said Miss Gaunt to herself. "It's a comfort to know that one of the three of us will have a few winks of sleep, and the only one of the three with any sentiment worth mentioning. There's not a woman living who's spent more sleepless nights to such little purpose over the woes of her neighbours than Ella—Poor Ella!—Goodness! but I'm tired."

CHAPTER III

BETWEEN the new pain and the old, Mary was tired to death, and with the new so fresh in her mind, she thought to sleep at least a little, and to dream of pensive old sorrows all sweet with *pot-pourri*. But no such luck for the poor woman !

A sorrow old and fragrant enough to send a sympathetic heart to sleep had no chance against the sordid, immature bitterness of that now devastating her own wild, modern being.

It was all so curious and so incredible. Mrs. Mirrilies could not accustom herself to her amazing new position.

The position already existing had been so entirely satisfactory—in its way. It had always seemed to her that she had established and managed it with consummate skill and ability, had strengthened and defended and made it final with perfect aplomb and temper.

Through the long tired years that it had lasted, she had gone on unfalteringly with an assured confidence of being able to go on indefinitely at the same even pace, never to look tired, much less look bored or dull, but to laugh and to be gay through everything. Even India had failed to subdue her spirit, and it had not touched her complexion. This had been the greatest comfort to her. If a woman can *look* victorious, can keep her colour, and her ability to laugh and to love laughter, even under partial defeat, it must surely be a guarantee of ultimate and triumphant victory.

And now she looked as worn as all the rest, and had as little desire to laugh as they, and if there was one thing

that Mary hated more than another, it was to be one in a crowd. And to be one in the crowd of ineffectual matrimony!—It was unthinkable!

The secrecy, the silence of it all—the smiling smoothness of the horrible thing! That the ground should be cut from under her feet, her carefully erected defences razed to the ground, her life and Oliver's cut clean asunder, without one breath of scandal—the remotest suspicion in the public mind of any real parting of the ways!

And yet the thing was done, the ways were parted! Mary stood aghast before the relentless force of Oliver MIRRILIES, the efficiency and the finish in his modes of action. She had always keenly appreciated the intellect of Oliver, as well she might, having married him for it, but it was only now, perhaps for the first time in her life, that she really understood the extraordinary way in which his seniors believed in Oliver.

It was an odd moment in which to arrive at a full understanding of the professional ability of one's husband! Mary laughed as she sat at the window, looking out over the grimy grey roofs. She laughed again, brushed her hair vigorously and remembered a way it had of falling into very wide waves. Oliver used to have a sort of adoration for her hair. His admiration had always been rather a big and splendid thing. She wondered how on earth she would ever get on without it. But *that* had never been what she wanted, she sternly assured herself.

She put down her brush, and firmly rolled up the dusky masses of her hair.

* * * * *

Mary Austin had just left school, having passed everything that a girl could pass, and was taking an intelligent look in at the world before going to Girton, when she first met Oliver.

Oliver was comparatively old, twenty-four, and in the matter of distinctions he had beaten her hollow. Even for a Sapper, he was exceptional. There was nothing

that young Oliver Mirrilies couldn't do with his brains Mary fell head over heels in love with them. And Oliver was not in any sort of way behindhand. He was much more wholesale in his methods, however. He fell in love with every atom of Mary. She might have had no brains at all for all he cared. It was Mary herself, the infinite woman, he so wildly loved. He was glad she had an intellect when his delight in the rest of her permitted him to consider the matter at all; it was part of her completeness; indirectly as essential to the perfect woman as intuition; but it was Mary herself who intoxicated the boy who had never in all his life been drunken with strong drink. It was an experience for the Gods; it lifted him to Heaven.

Mary's wings were only sprouting and far too weak to lift her anywhere near Heaven. Oliver, however, was an upstanding, good-looking boy with the nicest blue eyes she had ever seen. His well-trained mind promised her an intellectual harvest far richer than anything Girton could offer, so she dropped Girton like a hot coal and took Oliver.

Although Oliver was a hard worker and rapacious for knowledge, he had an insatiable appetite for sport, and was anything but a pale-blooded ascetic. His passions, as he knew to his cost, were stronger than those of most men, and they gave him perhaps more trouble than they gave most men. But he had never been afraid of trouble, and from the very beginning he had deliberately taken the matter in hand, and in the same quiet, purposeful way in which he did the other tough jobs, he pulled this through also. It was the only thing for him to do. It must be one thing or the other with him, and he knew it. Some fellows, he supposed, had wide capacities and could live anyhow and do good work at the same time, but he happened to be made differently. Besides, giving in to things had always struck him as being rather cheap.

But passion suppressed is never passion subdued in a strong man, and when at last the long painful biting and curbing of nature was at an end, Oliver dropped at

a bound from Heaven to earth, and rejoiced in it with all the powers of his clean and lusty manhood.

The unfortunate thing was that the new and wonderful revelation of life lifted Mary from earth to Heaven, and made everything to do with earth most horrible and remote, and altogether alien to and unbefitting the soaring intellect of a great and good man. She was absolutely aghast at Oliver.

Work and games having absorbed all her energies, Mary was singularly undeveloped physically, and didn't want to understand Oliver, or his revolting points of view, and Oliver was perhaps too young to find words right and beautiful enough to bring home to a mind and body both immature and unready the knowledge of the difficult things of time. He did not even attempt to do so. The boy had known only a few good women and no bad ones, and so he knew nothing, and was very shy. Whilst like all men conscious of their pitiful ignorance, he was yet aware in the silence of his soul, that considering the price they have paid for it, it is the one thing of which they have the slightest reason to be proud.

Mary had *inherited* her power to laugh and her love of laughter. It was in the warp and woof of her, leaving her sense of humour as undeveloped as her other senses. She had some idea of justice, however, so she was reasonable on the whole. She carried off her shock, which had struck deep, with a high hand. She took nothing violently. She refrained from the usual morbidities, in no way abated her attention to her appearance, danced like a sprite, and sang like a bird. She even developed a talent for cookery and made an excellent housewife.

But she became more intellectual every day, and thought a good deal and quite sensibly upon burning questions. She also consorted with other women interested in the same sort of thing, who were much more foolish even than herself. Indeed, in time, after she had settled down in Quetta, Mary made herself quite a power in the land, and her opinion upon a variety of subjects was well worth attention.

And yet after the first few months Oliver, strange to say, never asked for it. He worked very quietly upon his own beat and kept counsel with himself. At the same time he admired Mary's intelligence immensely, and nothing he liked better than to dance with her, and to wonder at the fullness and the rich completeness in body, mind, and presumably heart of this marvellous Mary, who so absolutely baffled all desire.

Her failure to bring all the powers of her fine intellect to help Oliver hurt Mary to her very heart. She knew what she could do for Oliver, she throbbed with the desire to serve him, in her own way. Their ways didn't meet, hers and Oliver's, that was all.

Oliver was rapacious in all things. He had limitless ideas, and was generous to a degree, and giving everything he expected to be given everything in return.

Reserve and reservations he understood, he was too fine a man not to understand and respect them, but withholdings were beyond him, especially the withholdings which sit proudly on a usurped throne at the back of a woman's mind.

He had won his rights, and in true love to Oliver the least was even as the greatest. It was all marvellous and full of shining light, and that Mary should behold darkness where he could see only light was altogether extraordinary.

Therefore since only the whole of a man or of a woman counts in any vital point that calls for the final and infallible judgment of the eternal two become one, it had hardly even struck Oliver now for many years to bring part of himself to consult part of Mary. It was no longer the natural thing. The judgment of any other intelligent and loyal friend would be as good or better. To take his difficulties to Mary now would be to go to her under false pretences, and Oliver was straight to a fault, and had begun to grow hard and stern.

The constant and enforced repression of a very considerable part of a man's nature, when done honestly for the sake of a small God, may make saints in a small way. But when done against any virile modern conception of

the will of the great God who made men, it becomes a process neither ripening nor expanding. It is silencing also. Oliver said very little. He stood rather aside and watched Mary's scheme of self-development, marvelling.

That it would have been considerably better had he tackled Mary, brutally if necessary, shown her the utter folly of her ways, and taken his rights at the point of the sword, there is but little doubt. Bludgeon-like methods, however, were not in the nature of Oliver.

He only used them at last when driven to it by the barren years.

But women get driven to things too, in course of time. Mary began very early in the day to find dancing and laughing and keeping her house in order, not quite enough. The less women live the more they think, and Mary fell to thinking far more than was good for her. Worse than that, she began to develop theories of life, and to bring them into practice,—to try experiments with them.

Mary's intellectual points of view were admirable. She had been terribly wise at school and was still wise in a rather terrifying way. She had the very highest opinion of love. She loved it from the highest point of view of which she was capable; but Oliver of the broad brow and the true eye, a god amongst men, to be rooting for truffles when he might be fixing his eyes to a star, was a sight to make women and the gods weep.

Had Oliver been anyone else, the ordinary young Infantry fool, for example, Mary felt sure she would hardly have minded at all. But Oliver!—Higher Education had apparently some fundamental flaw in it. Oliver to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage, to exchange Heaven for Hell! To be just like all the others!

Any basis of love so low, so abject, so revoltingly primitive and incapable of development on its own lines, unfit indeed for anything but ultimate and complete spiritual transformation into something else, must of divine right, be as objectionable to Oliver, at his best, as to herself. Until it had been lifted from earth to Heaven, turned into

a new thing altogether, with only a far-away, remote relation with its lowly origin, the thing he apparently called love was not good enough for Oliver.

While thinking out these matters Mary stumbled upon a little pamphlet entitled "Higher Love." It delighted and obsessed her. She ate it and drank it. It was in her eye every time she looked at Oliver. Any love that she cared to behold with unhooded eyes was now founded upon the sublime sentiments set forth in this very admirable piece of literature for adults, and upon the Oliver founded on this pamphlet Mary could gloat for hours.

Mary's first and only child, for the moment with his grandmother, was the most beautiful person living, but as she got to know more about these vital questions, until this shuddering barrier between her and Oliver were broken down, she would run no further risks. Her responsibility was too immense. No other child of hers should be born without—everything. She would do no eternal wrong to her own blood and bone.

So with no words, some heroism, and a good deal of simple dignity, Mary fell to acquiring tons of undesirable knowledge, and waited with much patience for the transformation of Oliver, and the perfect birth. Oliver knew very well what she was after. He watched this born mother of men with shame and anguish, and again he marvelled.

Meanwhile Oliver, she felt certain, was growing day by day, more spiritual, less fond of truffles. She had great hopes.

And Oliver, true to his principles, gave her all the rope she wanted.

And then like a bolt from the blue came the stroke of fate, the day of doom, which took from her—everything.

To a woman like Mary the shock was inconceivably crushing. She had been so simply sure of her point of view. To her, spirit was spirit, and flesh was flesh ; hostile forces impenetrable the one to the other.

Everything in one fell swoop to be torn from her hands ! The hands she had believed, in spite of everything, to be capable of grasping ultimate victory in their strong clasp,

victory for her, and for Oliver, and for the wonderful children they were going to give to the world.

And to have stood with empty hands, passive to the blow! That was so very amazing. The end, the final judgment had been so swift, so inevitable that she had stood mute and unprotesting, accepting the fate meted out to her. She had been reduced to nothingness, without one word, in the twinkling of an eye.

The outrage put upon her seemed to have choked thought, word, and deed.

As she thought of it now she panted and paled. Great waves of inexplicable pain surged up in her, tumbling one over the other, swallowing her, drawing her down into their icy terrors.

This was like madness, and Mary prided herself upon being sane. She tried to collect herself, to consider the matter, reasonably and dispassionately, but all she could think of with any logical clearness at all was that Oliver had looked so old when he had uttered her condemnation. He must have grown old while he had been thinking it all out, and she had not noticed it.

He had looked for so long extraordinarily young for a sapper,—they grow old so much more quickly than the others,—that she had got accustomed to his always looking like a boy. It was curious that she should not have noticed that suddenly he had grown old. And yet she hadn't—then. Yet now—now—it seemed the hardest and saddest thing of all to see Oliver grown suddenly so old. And Oliver's words—they too had grown old.

* * * * *

She was sitting in her pretty room when he came in, and she had a new frock on, the heavenliest old rose, and she hoped he would notice it. Perhaps he did. He looked her up and down and all over. Nothing could have escaped him. She was glad that she must have looked her very best. It was the last time he had really looked at her, or would ever look, perhaps.

* * * * *

She shivered now in the warm air.

Oliver was moving about, touching things, not nervously, Oliver couldn't be nervous, but it was a curious, rhythmic way he had sometimes when he spoke seriously,—a thing he very seldom did,—as though he wanted to tune his words to the right key before he began.

Then he spoke quite quietly and pleasantly. He might have been talking of polo ponies, and in his deep, low, extraordinary voice—Oliver couldn't speak loud if he tried, but in a queer way his voice always reminded Mary of the deep bay of the famous hounds long ago in her father's kennels,—cruel, awful, gentle creatures that had always been part of home to her.

But to be thinking of the tone of Oliver's voice now!—Mary sat up and steadied her throbbing head in her hands.

"I say, Mary," said Oliver, "don't you think we've had enough of this, ten years of it, you know, and pretty barren years at that, and not a step forrader, you and I. I don't know how you feel about it, but I've had just about as much as I can stick.—I want to do things, no end of them, you know. I can't, as things are now between us. It's the way I'm made. It may be a bad way, God knows, but I can't live in the same house with you any longer, and live as we're living. I can't live in the same country, or the same Continent, I believe."

"I—I wonder how I looked?" said Mary, turning her white face to the night; "for then he stopped and laughed."

She shuddered. "It was a horrible laugh," she said, falling together in her chair, "and I hadn't a word to say. How on earth could I? Ah! it's all coming back now—at last—" she said, pushing her hair from her forehead.

Oliver stopped touching the things, and his hands on the table looked so brown and strong and small. "I've been offered two jobs in one week," he said; "one on the North-West Frontier—Dera Ismail Khan—the other in Assam. I've taken the one on the North-West Frontier. The place is impossible for you and the boy—the boy you begrimed me."

"And—and—even if I did," she moaned, with burning cheeks,—"he needn't have said it like that. Oh, he needn't have said it."

"I don't intend to be a failure all round at my age," he said, "even for you.—And—" he said then—"still less do I intend to have any more children killed or evaded,—for whimsies."

"Oh! he said it," she said; "he said that as if I hadn't thought it all out,—as if I wanted to kill or evade my children. Oh! If Oliver could only just understand! One could not say it all in words,—one couldn't—but he might have known."

For the next few minutes Mary was submerged and strangled in a whirling tornado of sobs. Like all women who keep tears at bay with laughter, her crying, when it began, was a desperate business, it tore curious things in the very centre of her asunder, and ploughed furrows on her smooth young face. Mary was really very simple and sincere in her high-mindedness.

"It was so final," she said at last, "so quick, and quiet—and so utterly—utterly unnecessary. Talk of crushing a butterfly with a wheel!"

* * * * *

If only she could go to bed and sleep and sleep and wake up different!

But she could not leave the past this weary night. She opened the other window and looked down on to the square. One car after the other slipped furtively past. She caught glimpses of flushed men and laughing women, and more than one woman, and several of the men looked horrible to Mary's strained excited eyes. In the shadow of a plane tree a well-dressed man, pathetically young, was talking eagerly to a woman worlds too old for his poor innocence.

Mary shivered and hid her face.

"And Oliver—" she muttered. "He wanted—that!—that!—Oliver! Is there no escape anywhere from the vile thing? And—and—the children I might have had,—

and to speak as he did—to make me just like the others. As if I didn't want them too, as if I was not wanting them all the time,—As if I didn't want them a million times more than he could."

She sank deeper in her chair, and other little bits of the old life so lately ended came back etched out sharply against the shadows of the night, and Oliver's words, his quick, clear-cut, final words,—so dreadful and unforgettable.

She turned in her great anguish from Oliver to his child—and suddenly she was afraid also of his child.

She felt like a worm. And she had never felt like a worm yet. To be afraid of one's own child !

Mary had always associated Oliver the Less as little as she could with his father, for reasons which she kept secret even from herself,—the only being created of God who can do this is the intellectual woman!—but now he seemed suddenly to have become Oliver's child altogether. The boy was Oliver's, with all Oliver's incomprehensible points of view. After her experience of Oliver—her failure—she shook and trembled. She was afraid—afraid of her own child, and terribly alone.

She seemed to want help and counsel in the most extraordinary way; she seemed to have wandered into an unknown country, and she wanted some native of the strange dark land to show her the way.

For an independent creature full of high purpose, Mary felt very sick and faint.

She crept into bed at last, and in the morning Cousin Ella mourned secretly because of her haggard appearance, and upon the stroke of eleven, Miss Gaunt brought her a glass of her far-famed egg-flip. Mary swallowed it, laughing and protesting.

It was, to be sure, an odd ending to the high purpose of a life.

CHAPTER IV

THE German governess, in spite of certain less agreeable characteristics, had a keen eye for intellect, and a keener for any symptom of marital discomfort, howsoever subtle, deep-seated and well-concealed it might be.

She laid claim herself to no superhuman virtue. Like the meanest of her sex, she too had suffered in her time leanings towards matrimony. She had interviewed and dismissed more than one solid young man of good professional family, and could now thank God that she had declined to link herself indissolubly to the material needs of anyone, but had preserved herself free of interruption for the confounding of fools and the advancement of culture. At the same time, for the rounding out and the expansion of the soaring mind, all theoretical knowledge is essential. The curiosity of Fräulein was therefore insatiable, and more than all else in life did she love a heart-to-heart conversation.

Directly she laid eyes upon the tall Englishwoman she had perceived in her an affinity. So bountifully endowed by Nature amidst this flat-chested people, she reminded her of herself. The resemblance went deeper. In howsoever infinitesimal proportions this young person possessed both intellect and soul. Moreover, having stored up her sentiment as providently as she did her old clothes, and with much less inconvenience to her entertainers, Fräulein had a colossal amount always in stock and always at the disposal of inferior nationalities.

So after three attempts she had succeeded at last in nailing down Mary to the heart-to-heart.

By the time she had her safe in a comfortable chair,—for if great Fräulein was also merciful,—and her large goggling eyes were firmly fixed upon her, the dimples of Mary had already begun to twinkle. This scandalized the serious German, so little did it go with her preconceived theory of the matrimonial fiasco. For surely if anything in life ever demanded a serious exterior it is husbands.

“The usual effrontery of thy little nation,” said Fräulein in the silence of her soul.

She was not rigid, however, but always made concessions to the idiosyncrasies of the nations beneath her. With an indulgent smile, she mentioned the weather.

It was perfect and Mary admitted it.

She spoke of the Theatre. Mary made fitting reply. Then in an unguarded moment she projected politics into the breach.

The attitude of the Press was at that moment a slightly amused one. The Kaiser had been lately moved to utter words of wisdom. Mary’s dimples deepened. Fräulein may have blundered but she refused to budge.

The Fatherland being eternal would remain, this young woman throbbing with useful information was only too obviously of time, and might carry herself off at any moment. With a movement that fascinated Mary, so full was it of indomitable will-power, Fräulein, so to speak, consolidated herself. Without a moment’s warning, she wheeled all her revolving abundance of contour into line, and sat erect, a solid, purposeful, invincible mass of high purpose. The solidity seemed to project itself out from either flank of Fräulein—to be remorselessly filling space. Mary felt as though she were being absorbed by immensity; that very soon there would no longer be room for her anywhere. The ponderous mass of Germany seemed to be closing her in on every side, slowly and inexorably as the folds of the anaconda compressing her into nothingness.

“Goodness gracious,” reflected Mary. “Is this what’s going to happen to us? Is this what Germany’s out for? Does she mean suddenly to stop wobbling, swell herself

to her full size, and block us out of the Universe.—No Universe could stand much of this sort of thing in the mass."

"You're very young, Mrs. Mirrilies, even for your years," said Germany with solemn warning.

"I feel quite a decent age," said Mary meekly.

"Ach, but that is very likely. It is the insolence of the married, and does not count. You have one husband and one child. You do naturally know all things. The Infinite indeed is not hid from those wide eyes of—hem!—Experience. We, who have studied in the great schools, who have spoken of High Things with the learned ones, who have pierced with the trained imagination through experience to the thing that *Is*—who know"—Fräulein sat solider—"without experience—*all* things—we—we are as nothing to her with the one husband and the one child in this so dull land of prose and practice."

Mary was now beaming with interest.

"But, Fräulein," she said, "you're quite mistaken really. Having a husband and child does not make one the least uppish. It has, I assure you, quite the contrary effect."

"Unhappily, in a long life most rich and full, I have missed the exceptions."

Fräulein sniffed. "Does the miserable married one when she knows not what to do or where to turn, seek her who has looked on and experienced in her rich and hospitable imagination all sorrow and all joy, and has ordered and classified the result with the trained mind of the observer, and is ready and efficient to help, does she seek her? Ach, no, a thousand times no! She goes to the nearest creature of her own kind, who without thought or reflection, without foresight or prophetic vision, has brought into the world, as an animal might, helpless souls—immortal or not as the case may be, the question is yet an open one—and brought them up probably as though the little soul of time—if such there be—should perish as the grass that makes your so great fields; but, believe me the high matters in

this world of so colossal complications can alone be dealt with by the trained mind of the impersonal one 'who thinks.' "

The awful enterprising soul of the woman bent on self-development seemed to be getting its tentacles into Mary. But how on earth did it happen? she thought. From the very first instant she had realized anything Mary had made it a rule never to look mawkish.

She sighed. Husbands, even if absent, seem to have a fiendish power of betraying you into the hands of the Philistines, and it was just like a German to attack you without any *casus belli* at all, just when the mood took her. Mary looked at the Ultimate World Power and reflected.

It would have been quite easy to be haughty, but ridiculous with two round owl's eyes fixed on you, with a glint of benevolence behind their goggled terrors. She laughed instead.

"The large productive person you describe," she said, "would be the last creature living any one engaged more or less in the same occupation,—in a more intelligent way of course,—would care to disturb with her own probably vain complications. She'd find the expert less absorbed, and much more helpful, I have no doubt. Still, a little practice in these matters does help, don't you think, in a mixed world?" she modestly suggested.

"Most certainly yes! When for the highest culture of one part of the being, another part, albeit of baser quality, must unhappily be permitted fallow to lie, none but the rare and supreme intelligence can maintain the perfect balance." Here Fräulein paused, and further solidifying herself, sat as an everlasting monument upon its plinth.

"But it *is* possible. It *is* done.—And in the German is it never at the expense of the mighty universal heart, so full of sentiment—of the colossal, so well-trained intellect—of the spirit to which there is no equal, and they are all—all—" she took in the whole of Mary and paused as though to digest it, "they are all, I say, at the disposal of all nations."

" You are most awfully kind and generous," said Mary, looking with all the solemnity she could muster at the kind round eyes. " I quite understand the size and the weight of the offer you're making. It's really rather immense, and some day when perhaps I may have the ill luck to get tripped up in subtle complications, I'll come to you. With a list of moral qualifications like yours, it would be invidious to ask for practical experience as well. You're a potential expert in everything requiring expert knowledge."

This spontaneous tribute was gratifying but unsatisfactory. Fräulein adjusted her glasses, and prepared for a fresh attack. Mary's leisurely voice almost imperceptibly put on pace.

" I wonder," she said, " since you're so ready to give so much to high demands, and have so much to give, if you'd help me in quite a little practical way. You're much too all-round a person, Fräulein, not to be practical in the little ordinary things. My husband has been ordered for three years to a station in India, which is too unhealthy for us, my boy and me—we'd only add to my husband's cares, we're better at home, but three years is a long time, and I'd like to do something definite with it. I'd like to go to Lectures and things—somewhere—in Switzerland, I think. I can speak German and French fairly well, and I've passed things here. I hear you've been through the University of Zürich—I wonder if I could get in there, as a Student, and work a little."

" Work a little,—work a little," repeated Fräulein, when at last she could speak at all, "*Gott Almächtig,* work a little! To obtain a degree in that great University for the least of the human avocations,—the drawing of the teeth, the manuring of the soil, the succour of the beasts that perish—one must work—not a little—not as the English work,—one hour's work with the half heart, the next three play with the whole heart,—but work as those to whom the intellect is as the God in Heaven, sovereign over all. To the intellect we of the Teuton race alone bow. It is our King and ruler. Proud

and free we stand erect yet respectful, before Kaiser or King,—we humble ourselves in the presence of the Professor."

"But my little was only a figure of speech," pleaded Mary. "I'll work like anything really. I love work."

"As the English love it! *Mein Gott!*—I know the way! I have had fifteen English pupils."

"Never mind," said Mary, laughing. "If I can't convince you, I'll convince your Professors. You just wait and see."

"So!—That will I. Also inquiries make,—I know the great minds of that great University."

"That's good luck for me then. I'm glad I came to you," said Mary, whipping out her note-book. "Now please tell me—oh! everything you know."

And indeed before she knew where she was, Fräulein was being turned inside out by the contemptible intelligence she had designed to develop.

The amount of accurate, ordered, above all—essential information—that the ignorant islander seemed to have extracted from her in that pregnant and never-to-be-forgotten half-hour, made Fräulein sit up that night in bed and think deeply. She drew round her the flannel bed-gown worn over the chemise of the day to save washing, resumed her glasses, turned on the light, and gasped.

The young woman had simply emptied her of good marketable information, and given her in return absolutely none. Once again had the colossal and well-trained Intellect of the incomparable Nation yielded up its treasure to this people who have no philosophy, and know not what work is. "They laugh, those ineffectual ones without depth," muttered Fräulein, "and in words of one syllable they take down the herculean efforts of our brains and make use of them, while we still meditate. *Ja wohl!*—they use them," she muttered, gnashing her teeth.

Presently a kindlier light stole into her outraged eyes. "But *Gott im Himmel*," she murmured, sinking to rest, "the asparagus was good."

It certainly was. In a fierce frenzy of gratitude and contrition, Mary had gone out immediately after the heart-to-heart, and ordered in enough to feed a regiment, and afterwards told the story of how she was moved to buy it in such a way that even Cousin Ella could eat the result of the purchase with a mild twinkle in her proud eyes.

"And," said Mary, "she told me of a lot of Hotels and Pensions in Zürich, and wound up with a weird place that would best suit me, she thinks. It's acutely respectable and costs nothing."

"But, dearest Mary, you have a princely allowance," said Cousin Ella anxiously.

"But I never can keep money when I'm on my own. It goes somehow."

"My dear! You look so sensible."

"I know," said Mary, she sat for a moment thoughtfully musing, then stood up and looked herself all over in a long mirror, "but I'm not so sensible as I look, I think. I doubt if I've come to my senses at all. I'm not so—anything,—as I look, I fancy," she said with a backward kick to her skirts, looking over her shoulder at her splendid person. "I wonder if I could be a whitened sepulchre by any chance. It never struck me before."

"My dear—you look so—so very—" Cousin Ella paused to blush, she found a certain difficulty in describing Mary.

"So well nourished within and without," said Miss Gaunt briskly. "Is that what you mean, dear?"

"Yes—well, partly, I suppose. As if she—she knew everything," said Ella. "I—I don't mean horrid things," she explained nervously, "but I think that Mary looks somehow—oh! you know—rich with knowledge of the great things of life."

"There's a compliment for you, Mary," said Miss Gaunt.

Mary was looking down at the two women and frowning a little, and suddenly a look of half comical fright seemed to slip into her laughing eyes.

"It's a compliment I don't deserve, I think,—I'm not sure that Cousin Ella shouldn't have paid it to you—Miss Gaunt—instead of to me."

"To me! Ella knows better than to dare. She and I have stood aside now for a good many years, and looked on. We've sat in the shade in summer, and by the fire in winter and made shots at life. Sometimes, we flatter ourselves, we've hit the mark. But guess work isn't after all the real thing. You have the two keys to life, a husband and a child in a pair of very capable hands, Mary. If you don't know a good deal well worth knowing that we're cut out of, well—you ought to, that's all I can say."

"Goodness gracious," said Mary, balancing herself on the edge of a chair, "this is an educational sort of visit. Not three hours ago one spinster lady tells me that the mere possession of one husband and one child is enough to make the greatest fool going unbearable, that she scorns from the unassailable heights of matrimony, generally undeserved, all the spinsters in creation, and yet free and unburdened these latter can scale heights she never could even attempt with her impedimenta, and now another with twice her brains, admits that she's not so far out. I've gone off the line somehow, I believe, for I can't see at all why the meanest thing in matrimony should score off the highest in celibacy. I feel anything but proud and superior because of my married state. I felt much more puffed up with knowledge at school than I do now in spite of husband and child!"

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Miss Gaunt stoutly.

"Dearest Julia——"

"If Mary feels like that with all her opportunities, Ella, she ought to be ashamed of herself. With the two and only keys to the great Magic, a husband and a child in her hands, Mary ought to be a treasure-house of beautiful things, and the very fact of her looking it, shows that we have the right to expect it of her."

"Dear me!" said Mary.

"So far, my dear Mary," said Miss Gaunt inexorably, "all that you've given us two poor denuded females always craving for the vicarious enjoyment of something Big could be put in a snuff-box. You've given us nothing at all of yourself, except the pleasure of looking at you, which is a very considerable one, and a very succulent and abundant dish of asparagus, which shows a heart at least. For the rest you're a very fine mask of flesh and blood."

"Julia, how can you?" wailed Miss Vynne.

"After a reasonable amount of patient waiting, I generally do say what I think. - I've waited three days to say this to Mary, and I shouldn't say it now if she weren't going to-morrow, and she's yours, not mine really, so I'm saying it in your presence."

"She belongs to us both equally," said Ella gently.

"Well, I won't be coy. I suppose she does.—This will probably be news to you, Mary, but I'd have you to know that you're our one and only child,—no one ever gave us the chance of another,—and we've waited years and years for you to come to us, and to bring us an echo of some big swinging joy we've never had ourselves. It would have been a sort of compensation, you know, for a variety of unpleasant renouncements. Don't look like that, Ella, for goodness sake, a little truth now and then is an excellent tonic, and your scared face shows just how much you want one. We've never really left you for a moment, Mary; we've lived your life with you.—Your marriage was ours." Ella blushed and clutched Julia's hand. "It was!—we couldn't go to it on account of your mumps, Ella, but we were there all the same. Our spirits, wearing such garments of gold and jewels as never were seen, were cutting capers all the time above your head.

"When your child came, there we were, too, at our old game. We've followed you with your magic keys, into a thousand locked doors, and sometimes *you* turned aside when *we* slipped in. I've seen marvels you've never beheld, my dear,—or your face would have told us."

"Julia! Oh, Julia!"

"Don't be always interrupting, Ella. I'm speaking for the two of us, so shut up. Indeed—since you've come and we've seen you—Mary, I'm often inclined to think that the only room you've ever really opened and thoroughly investigated is some Blue-beard's chamber of your own,—when Ella and I would give our very souls for your two keys that open everything."

"Julia!"

"Ella! Do shut up! Truth is always naked and unashamed. We *should* give our souls, Ella, and you know it for the two magic keys that Mary has used to open her ridiculous Blue-beard's chamber, and for nothing else. If I've only hinted at the truth for years I'm speaking it now. Mary might have gone to Girton for all she's learnt.

"I've finished now," said Miss Gaunt, "but I was determined to say it."

"But having said it, you can't possibly expect me to say anything in reply," said Mary, with the oddest laugh.

"I don't. I don't think you've got a word to say for yourself."

"I haven't," said Mary. "I'll go to bed."

Cousin Ella was crying in her corner. Mary sprang to her.

"You're quite right. You're both quite right. I know nothing," she said. "I've known it ever since I came here. It's something in your abominable subconscious atmosphere. I hate the very name of the thing. It takes the meanest advantage of the undefended. I'm going to Zürich to hear lectures on it and to get the better of it. You see if I don't."

"Do," said Miss Gaunt. "A little hard work won't hurt you."

"It's really rather awful to be the centre of romance to two minds so full of theories concerning it as yours," said Mary, pausing with her candle in her hand, to survey the mute, frail, tearful figure and the sturdy, smiling, voluble one.

"The fact of your feeling it so is pretty awful, I admit," said Miss Gaunt cheerfully, "and shows conclusively enough that you're not fulfilling your natural uses in a world where so few, comparatively, get the chance—that in the very midst of abundance you haven't taken in even enough to give out. The owner of the whole waving harvest ought to be able to give something to the poor gleaners in the stubble. There are twenty spinsters—of necessity not choice—in this stricken house, my dear, and in four days you ought to have been able to round them out a little with your own fullness, and instead you've left them a little emptier than you've found them, except for the asparagus."

"Julia! How hard you can be!" bleated Cousin Ella.

"I can," said Miss Gaunt self-righteously; "as hard as nails. I detest waste of good material, and good gracious! look at Mary's figure,—the tall deep-bosomed women, with their children nine and ten. You ought to have had at least six by this time, Mary."

"Julia!"

"Count the years and see!—Your smooth wide brow is painfully intellectual, Mary. How on earth will Oliver get on without it for three years?"

"Very well indeed," said Mary, with admirable calm. "He has an all-sufficient intellect of his own."

"Hem! I thought as much," murmured Miss Gaunt. "Zürich is a fatal place for a brain open to illimitable development."

"Oh, well, anyway," said Mary, with spirit, "I was never a prig."

"No, you have some sense of proportion. A prig with your figure. Heavens!"

Mary sighed.

"I feel like a whipped hound," she said. "May I go to bed?"

"Mary dearest, go!" cried the outraged Ella.

"There's going to be a storm to-night," said Miss Gaunt. "I'll go up and put pegs in Mary's windows."

"Julia! Julia! Let *me* go!"

"What *you* want, my dear, is some grog and a hot bottle in your bed. I'll see to *you* directly."

"Poor Mary," she said from the step behind Mrs. Mirrilies. "You can't escape me. I'm pursuing you to the very centre of your stronghold. That's what comes of getting into the hands of an experienced spinster. Ella would have wept in secret and spared you and herself, and thought it self-sacrificing. There's a lot of folly and some vanity in the very mixed matter of self-abnegation. Being an old maid for over fifty years is quite self-abnegation enough for any reasonable person."

"I've given you my impressions. You can make what you like of them, take them or leave them.—Oh, Mary!" she cried, "let me do your hair. How beautiful it is! I'm afraid Oliver will miss it horribly."

"There's one thing in all this that puzzles me," she said, after a long pause. "You were an absolutely fearless child. Is it possible that you're afraid of a climate?"

"No," said Mary. "I'm not in the least afraid."

Miss Gaunt brushed with unmoved serenity.

"Does Oliver know you're going to Zürich?"

"No, but he won't mind, he wants Oliver to speak German and French while he's young."

"You'll go up to the mountains in the holidays?"

"Yes, of course."

"You'll meet men of all nations by the score there," said Miss Gaunt thoughtfully.

"Oh, at least Oliver trusts me down to the ground."

"Goodness! As though I could ever doubt it. I wish he didn't."

"I'm extremely thankful he does."

"You would be, my dear."

"Oh, dear me, what *do* you want?"

"I want you to sit still for a minute longer." She twisted Mary's hair into a massive crown above her head, and looked with swelling pride at her handiwork.

"There's a good barber lost in me," she said. "Drop that dressing gown, Mary—so.—And now look at your-

self, child. I want you to be the woman you look, Mary—a marvel, a woman rich and full and strong enough not only to be able to resist temptation, but to be tempted. The first is nothing without the last."

"Oh!" said Mary blankly.

"I never saw anything so overflowing with joy as you were up there on the hill-tops, Mary. You were extraordinarily receptive. You went out and got everything, and I expected to see the whole of life in your eyes. And—look at you!—it's magnificent, but it's not war."

"You're horribly unfair in every way," cried Mary. "To dare to expect me to educate you!—You know too much already, I think."

"There's no daring on my part. It's you, my dear, who haven't dared to live, and who by your cowardice have robbed more than me of our rights in you."

"If you don't go, I'll never be able to sleep again," cried Mary wildly.

"Oh, yes, you will. I'll be back directly with a hot and potent drink. Don't squirm. I can hold my tongue when I want to. I've taken a most unwarrantable liberty, my dear, but you richly deserved it. That's what comes of being a governess or a parson. Unless you can take unwarrantable liberties with the creatures at your disposal both positions are untenable. Oh, there's one thing I'd better get in before I stop. I simply adore Oliver, and if I could be of any use to him from any point of view, I'd leave our flock to-morrow and desert Ella, and follow him to the ends of the earth. I hope no other female not so disqualified by time and the fortunes of war as myself will feel as acutely as I do in this delicate matter."

"And to expect me to sleep after this?" said Mary.

"You'll sleep as you used to do on the old hills before I've done with you, my dear."

"You despise and reject me even for the right things," said Mary, "for being worthy of Oliver's trust——"

"To be qualified to walk unscathed through a regiment is nothing, Mary. Many a spotless spinster could have

done as much at eighteen. The regiment wouldn't have bothered her. Half the feminine virtue going is apathy, inability to live or to be tempted—consequently to be debarred from temptation. The real woman with a pure heart can hurt and be hurt. She can do anything and be anything and feel anything, good or bad. She can want all that men want, passionately, primitively, with her whole heart. It's desiring the things that men desire and understanding them, above all being able to give them up when necessary, that alone makes a woman desirable. But to be pluming yourself upon resisting a pressure that's never put upon you has always struck me as wasted energy. The strongest of all natural feeling has been bred out of women to begin with, and what's left in them they train out for all they're worth. And the awfulness of it all for men and women, but above all for the little children——!"

In spite of her own perturbation and amazement Mary saw with the tail of her eye that Miss Gaunt herself was blushing like a girl.

"If the good women would expand a little more,—I firmly believe the bad would begin to dwindle. No man but likes the best when he sees it, but he likes it whole, not with half of it cut out in deference to a purely feminine ideal. If woman would trust more in God and man and less in her own shears and pruning knife, she'd do better and so would the world."

"What a torrent!" said Mary after the pause of a second.
"It's like a cloud burst. I'm drenched."

"It's my only chance. I can't be pouring out this sort of thing on our flock of folded spinsters. If it was anyone else but you I was drenching, oh! Mary, how happy I should be! My dear! My dear!"

CHAPTER V

BETWEEN the shock of her total immersion in the icy waters of truth, and the drastic correction applied by the inexorable Miss Gaunt, Mary slept for many hours the blissful sleep of a child ; but she awoke eventually to all the discomfort of a woman in her most acute form. Never in all her life had she felt more of a woman and less than she did now, in this grim, grimy London, just before the dawn. For then, stricken and deserted of Heaven and earth, conscious only of the lonely helplessness of her own immensity, and driven of despair, she turns at last her tired and suppliant eyes to Heaven.

It is the one little hour in which the great weary cities can ever find the time and the silence in which to pray.

And well may they pray ! It is the hour in which the terrors that fly by night fly swiftest. When the dying die hardest, and the living sin hardest, and the great cities, groaning and travailing in their mortal pain, wait most fervently for the manifestation of the sons of God.

The sorrow and the pain, and the infinite silence of it, seemed to drift into Mary, and to become one with her, and presently this began to frighten her. The thing, whatever it was, was so intolerably in earnest. It seemed to be wanting to make this one little moment at its disposal effective in the highest degree ; and to be clutching at all the forces in the Universe to help it in its great endeavour. It wanted everything in Heaven or on earth, it would seem, for the carrying on and living of the mighty life that seemed to be slipping through fingers weary from too long a clasp.

To feel as though you, as part of it, were holding on to

life with all your might, and at the same time beating off the terrors that hang upon the flanks of waning life, and all in the silence of the hour before the dawn, might well disturb an Alderman whom his dinner had doomed to wakefulness. The sensation drove Mary to the folly of jumping out of bed and switching on every light in the room. But the pale cold passionless flare seemed to mock some immense eternal demand in some illimitable heart that entreated. Mary switched off the lights and went full of vague pain and vague entreaty to the open window, and suddenly she was aware in the whispering hush, in the ice-blue light of dawn, that the tortured heart of a whole city was at prayer, and involuntarily she knelt down by the window seat, and dropped her head in her hands—and her heart seemed to go out to the other hearts and to join in their mute petition.

She had no words. She seemed to be just one of everything wanting to understand.

And presently high up over the dark roofs from some glory far away there shot out a little shaft of light.

It looked like a two-edged sword and it flashed as it turned in the darkness and seemed suddenly to gather in all the colour of all the jewels of the earth.

And somehow as the light spread in the heavens and the sun came up over a thousand roofs Mary felt as though some illimitable prayer were answered and a whole city cleansed from her sin. She was afraid to move lest the glory and the purification should pass her by.

She knelt breathless, and in spite of the pain and the passion of the prayer in which she had taken part, of which she herself had been a part, she knew that in common with all things she was now lifted above all pain and sorrow and sin and ugliness, and that God saw everything and that it was all very good.

“ And,” said Mary in an odd dazed voice :

“ ‘ God’s in his heaven,
All’s well with the world.’

“ And it’s quite true, and it’s the first time I ever believed it.”

She crouched down again by the window and listened with strained ears for more, but the moment had passed and another day was upon the world.

The buses rumbled and the motors hooted, and the city hummed with life. The monotonous moan of life went on as though it had never ceased. And Mary, chilled to the bone, wrapped herself up in her travelling rug.

Things, all the common things that had been transmuted were coming back. She resented their intrusion acutely ; she wanted to go to bed again, and to dress up everything that seemed to be stripping itself bare in dreams, all bejewelled with the fingers of the dawn.

" You can't recapture anything," said Mary. " I'll look out and see what's going on."

It seemed to concern her more nearly than ever it had done before, this fierce muttering sound of common toilers. It was hers and as much a part of her as it was of anyone else. That moment—now so curious and so far away, when they had been altogether in one tremendous prayer, seemed to have broken down some barrier between her and the world, and having mixed and mingled in the whole of the world, she could not get back to herself and to her comfortable detached atmosphere, all in a minute. She looked very longingly back at her old remoteness, there was a fascination in it, then her eyes turned again to the dawn. If she could not be once again one in the pain and the rapture, or go to sleep again and forget things, she could at least watch the world that seemed suddenly to belong to her out of the window.

As she looked she saw things of which she entirely disapproved, which only yesterday she had unhesitatingly condemned. Even now she shrunk from the thought of Oliver's being of the same flesh and blood as the people who did them. But the oddest little difference had crept into all her points of view.

Even the man reeling out of his car into the arms of the chauffeur didn't fill her with the unconditional loathing he would have done yesterday. Suddenly she wanted to know how a person as much a human being as herself,

could do such things. Oliver couldn't save his life, but—she thought, shivering—"but there's still little Oliver."

Yesterday she would have stamped and hurled the suggestion from her mind, yesterday she would have swept little Oliver into her own circle of light where such deeds of darkness were impossible, but now she knew vaguely but certainly that nothing high or low, or good or bad, is impossible to man. She shivered and shrank and threw out helpless arms to protect her child. Yet now she watched the movements of another belated sinner or so with a strange new pity.

No one knew less really of the manners and customs of this regrettable class than Mary, but she knew enough to be quite sure that saints don't come out early.

"Miss Gaunt was right," she said at last. "I know nothing of anything,—and I'm afraid of life."

There were hours before breakfast. She didn't feel equal to thinking of either of the Olivers. She'd go back and look things over in a general sort of way. It was not the slightest use letting yourself feel a worm if it was the other person, after all, who had a "coarse thumb" and planted it down indiscriminately.

Mary liked big events to which to fix her mind, but it was the little trivial details of her life in the Depôt lately and before that in India that would keep slipping in and distracting her attention. Things she had half forgotten, and that hadn't impressed her in the past, but now they stood up sturdily and confronted her with a new significance.

Mary was methodical, she wanted to bring back the school days when she had heaped up knowledge; they were so very important and meant so much, but all that, with no will of hers, went by at a gallop,—to make room for Oliver.

Of course Oliver was inevitable and could only be expected to take up some room,—but he needn't take it all up! Still, since Oliver was inevitable, he was as good a starting point as any other. So she accepted him just as she had accepted her marriage and her honeymoon.

And presently she was aware that the self she was seeing now was not altogether what she had intended it to be.—She had never been the least superior, never! She'd have died sooner. She had hated one prim old lady for calling her "an example." She had been furious because Oliver had only laughed.

But now, as things,—ridiculous things not worth remembering,—kept forcing themselves upon her memory, she looked again at herself steadily advancing along a clean white road.

She saw herself a rather solitary, remote figure, thinking her own thoughts,—very fine thoughts really,—and not in the least interested in other people's. And although never so much as lifting an eyebrow,—she had always been most careful in regard to that,—and laughing with seeming carelessness, she was walking delicately, her whole energies bent on keeping her petticoats clean, and sometimes she had put the tips of her fingers in her ears.

Perhaps the old lady was right after all. Perhaps she had been "an example." There was no doubt at all but they wanted one, and it served them right, said Mary viciously,—and she wasn't a prig at any rate. Nothing would induce her to admit that!

This vision of her resurrected self made Mrs. Mirrilles hot all over, all the same.

But even if she had been an example, at least she had never *said* things about any of them. She had just kept away from them and held her tongue.

"You never cared enough to say things," said something within her, "much less to do things,—to help anyone. You understood too little about anything or anybody but yourself to care."

"This, after being on every Committee in the Station, and President of three!" said Mary, aghast. "And—and—at any rate, Oliver had no right to grin in the way he did. He ought to have told me properly."

"And," she said after a long pause, "if he had I shouldn't have believed a word he said. I was so sure I knew—everything our little life could possibly want. At least

I was the cleverest woman there—just as clever as Oliver in a way!"

"It's all more than unpleasant," said Mary after a long survey of the Station and her own incapacity to grasp its little points of view. "And yet living with subalterns and things must educate you in some degree in the sins and other things peculiar to them. It's all horrible. And—I *am* a sort of whitened sepulchre. I look everything—and—and I'm sort of nothing at all.—When even Oliver had to throw me over!"

"It's no use crying," she sobbed; "and I can't cry for ever and ever, or be thinking things out either. I—I'll have a bath and put on my new frock. I'll stay a week longer and go out and—do things."

Her activity was indeed astonishing. She did more in that one week than most women can do in six, and she gave the spinsters the time of their life, and got back her colour—which was fortunate. She would want everything, it seemed, to do all she had got to do. She did not know in the least yet what it was. All she knew was that it was a great deal, and that she must do it all very carefully. It was to be a very great adventure—in the dark. And to what end?

That was the question. The dreadful doubt. If Mary had let herself dwell on that she would have lain awake all her nights and been useless all her days.

But if one has thrown away more than one knows, one must at least find out what it is.

* * * * *

"Couldn't you attend lectures here as well as in Zürich?" said Miss Gaunt one day. She had carefully refrained from further direct attack although in no sort of way repenting her of her initial onslaught.

"I suppose I could, but I want an absolute change of everything, even of language. You would listen to things in German you might resent in English. If I'm to be called a fool—I'd prefer to be called it in a foreign language."

"I shouldn't," said Miss Gaunt. "I've enjoyed that

privilege in four languages, and especially if it's as untrue an accusation as it would be in your case."

"I don't think I shall ever know how wise or how foolish I am," said Mary, "until I compare myself with other people—properly, and it's easier to do that somewhere else. When I've listened to all the Germans have to say about souls I may know something of them perhaps. And you yourself suggested men of all nations for my moments of relaxation. I'm out for knowledge this time."

"You look too young for it."

"But I look everything I don't happen to be."

"Haven't you forgiven me yet, Mary?"

Mary paused, laughed and kissed her.

"It was never any question of forgiveness between us two. I've belonged to you always in a way, I've belonged to no one else, not even to Cousin Ella."

"She belongs to both of us."

"Yes, that's it. You belong to people or they belong to you.—In a way, I've never belonged to anyone but myself! It was just a question of believing you or not, and I believe you, that's all. And, although for the moment, I'm beset with terrors, I'm going to be afraid of nothing. But I must find out first if the terrors I'm afraid of and the prejudices that keep me awake, are, well! all in my eye or not. If the things some people think necessary to their very existence, and others commit the most unpleasant sins for, are really good enough for all they cost. I'm going to look at the world with eyes wide open, and it's easier to look in that brazen way in a new world than an old."

"But, Mary, will you ever be able to let yourself go to that extent with your intellect?"

"Bother my intellect! That's got to stand by and take notes. It's souls I'm out for. And since we're now supposed to be porous in our inward parts and not impenetrable, as we used to be, all you've got to do in a favourable environment is to keep your pores open and let the innermost parts of other people filter into you, and you'll know as much about them as they know themselves."

You could never do this in England. We're too overladen with civilization. Think of the layers to be penetrated before one got to the essence."

" You'll never do it anywhere, Mary. That organ of selection, your unfortunate intellect, has been too long picking and choosing. You're too fastidious. You'd never stand other people airing their views in your inside."

" Fastidiousness," said Mary, after a long pause, " doesn't seem to have paid. I'll try opening the pores."

" Oh, well, you'll always have little Oliver to go home to, thank God," said Miss Gaunt; " his eyes will tell you as much or more than the babbling of all the souls in Europe. I wish it was all going to happen here."

" It would label you here. Everyone who came near you would be regulating his conversation to suit your new occupation, and you'd follow his lead from force of habit or absence of mind. You can't be absent-minded in a foreign language, and getting to know new sorts of people will keep you awake. Besides, they'll say things without considering either your feelings or your prejudices. I want new points of view."

" To correct the old with ? "

" Who knows ? Some day I may, and then I'll tell you."

" Zürich is perhaps just a game ? "

" But it's a new game, and one is always serious until one has learnt it."

" If it's seriousness you want, there's the poor—and politics."

" But what have I to give the poor ? The poor must wait, they're poor enough already without me, and so are Politics."

" The Church ? " suggested Miss Gaunt.

" The Church, like the poor, has a way of rubbing the ugliness of life into you. Besides, being a grass-widow in England wouldn't appeal either to the Church or to me."

" But in whatever place the English congregate there's a church and a grass-widow."

" Yes, with a difference. I want to be able to take sides—to be a partisan. Now I'm nothing—neither

Guelph nor Ghibelline, neither hot nor cold. There's no place in Heaven or Hell or even in Purgatory for those afraid to take sides and fight. Dante calls them 'wretches who have never lived, they wander for ever in the purlieus of the world,' and you said very much the same thing. If you're up against the necessity for a fundamental change, I'm sure it's best to go through with it in a foreign language.—Besides I'd better get away. If I don't, I'll either be boring people or letting them bore me."

CHAPTER VI

IT is only an Englishman in a thousand, especially if he belongs to that England whose normal occupation is to sit tight and be itself, who could ever think for a moment of leaving his Island behind him. Whither he goes must she go also. That is the eternal decree. As securely embedded in his insular sequestration as a fly in amber, he can live amongst friends or foes for ever, without ever becoming one of them.

He will appreciate and admire them indeed, carefully observe them, and learn by rote all the salient points of view that differentiate them from himself. He will even acknowledge certain of their points to be superior to his own.—These he will eventually anglicise and take over. He will also yield courteously to any custom the demands of courtesy make upon him: denationalizing if he will conform. But not until he has entirely broken it into its new ways and practices, and forgotten its alien origin, does it become *his* point of view or *his* custom. While everything he has unwillingly accepted, that has been forcibly imposed upon him, he will carry valiantly and without comment, a burden upon his back in his fifty years in any land not under the English flag, but it will slip off him like water off a duck's back, after a week's residence in the real England.

Anything that belongs to the world, of course, such as Literature, Music, Art, or Science, he will absorb and assimilate and make peculiarly his own. Trust him to see to it that it is English to the backbone before he is

done with it ! for in the *great* things of life England to the true Englishman, is the world.

The friendship, moreover, of the Englishman for one of another race can be as staunch and true, as great and as beautiful as that with his nearest neighbour in the Province that bred them both, but the bonds that bind them,—the alien and himself,—are woven of English wool and spun in English looms. The Englishman loves the other, not for international, but on the contrary, for wholly national reasons. Delving down through the dross of unessential racial differences, he strikes in the very core of the soul that calls to his in the great Reality—an Englishman !

This worthy brother would feel himself a traitor to his country were he to admit that the fact of being universal is another thing altogether from being English, and that it is this, and not England, which has bridged the gulf and made of the two, one.

It is the Englishman's naïve expression of his emotions in this great matter that betrays him.

"A white man that," says he, "as English as they make 'em. He may hate us, poor fellow, but he's English to the backbone. You feel it at every turn. Too good a fellow to be anything else."

Those others are more adaptable. Perhaps being a nation of Philosophers has made every German universal. At any rate he permits himself to be very readily absorbed. An educated German will find no difficulty in becoming an American citizen dyed in the wool in half a generation.

After twenty years' residence in England a man of parts has been known to forget the original spelling of his own notable name, and to pronounce it in such a way as to rob it of all significance.

The German does this sort of thing on a system, for purposes of commerce, diplomacy or convenience, and to show the immense capacity of his great mind in overcoming colossal obstacles. Sometimes he does it to betray our innocence.

But in any case the eternal gain is no doubt ours.

Perhaps, after all, the Englishman is right, and that English and Universal *are* convertible terms.

* * * * *

As soon as Mary had settled down in an Hotel on the slopes of the vine-clad hills above Zürich, and appeared in Church with Oliver in tow, being tall and straight and a grass-widow as well, with a mark of interrogation behind her, everyone came to call.

All the English who attended the Church and the great bazaar, and the sewing parties, and were in a general way on the Chaplain's list, came. And the Swiss who were nice enough to be English came. Also the Germans of the same high quality, but of these but a select few. They were much too occupied being purely German, to bother.

And one and all they adored Oliver the Less;—but even if they had been Hottentots they couldn't have helped doing that! They all asked Mary to tea, and all the others to meet her. There was a perfect outbreak of festivities, and everything, even the tea parties, seemed to circle in the oddest way, around the Church.

At first this bewildered Mary. There was too much potential goodness in Mary not to drive her tendencies, in spite of her intellect and other disqualifications, full in the direction of religion. This closing in round the Church, however, and making of it the core and the centre of life, she did not understand. But it came to her suddenly one day.

The whole process was a sacramental one, and the Church the outward and visible sign of England!

It could not be otherwise. It would have been a moral impossibility to turn the British Consulate into a symbol, and so it had to be the Church. Even if a man carries his country all over him, so to speak, he likes to let others see some outward manifestation of it in space.

In the little society there were very few men, and those who existed were mostly on the retired list, and rarely showed themselves. To Mary, used to India, this was rather awful. She wondered if she could ever

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and it or how the Chaplain had so long survived the ordeal,—he who had lived a man amongst men for so many ears.

But presently she found that besides being a man he was also a Christian and a hero, and his valiant shouldering of the burden of all chaplains, gave her eventually both courage and diversion. And there were always the boys, for both her and the Chaplain. The little trickling stream of boys that flows year in, year out from England into the foreign universities, to learn in their great technical schools more cheaply, possibly more thoroughly, than they can learn at home.

It is, on the whole, a sad little stream, if the making of young life with all its bitter tragedy, can ever be sad. It is too big an enterprise on the part of God and man perhaps for so small a word.

When an English lad is plunged from a Public School into one of the *Instituts* where men of all nations are prepared for the Universities, generally without a word of sensible advice, the shock is tremendous. He must recover himself before he can make anything at all of it. It is all so shattering and unexpected. He had known, of course, as any fool knows, that strange things must happen directly he got amongst foreigners, but this?

Brought up in other ways, by other methods, with other points of view, under another public opinion, the average boy is apt, in the first surprise of feeling himself inadequate to the situation, to lose his sense of proportion altogether, and to see himself either too big or too little.

Anything but a voracious worker, to find himself in a whirling vortex of voracity is alarming in itself. That, although your brains are as good or better than those of the Greek, or the Brazilian, or the Pomeranian or the Bulgarian, *he* has been trained for sedulous years with one or two objects in view, the University or the Polytechnicum. He knows a hundred facts definitely, of which you have only the haziest idea, or no idea at all. He is stuffed to repletion with facts, mostly useless, and to be dropped like hot coals directly he's got his nose into the university.

Stuffing oneself with things one can't digest or use, strikes the English boy not only as rot, but to his crude notions it is unjust to be ploughed in the beastly things, when he could pass in everything that matters, so he works honestly enough at the essential and trusts to Providence or the common sense of the Examiners for the unessential, probably fails at his first shot, and resents his failure instead of being ashamed of it.

He has, in short, failed once again to adapt himself, as the nimbler Greek or Brazilian or Slav has done, and feeling miles above the lot of them, he is yet despised by them all.

There are other difficulties moreover. The strange mixed population of these *Instituts* with its strange mixed vices, must inevitably prove an ordeal of fire to any young English boy. A few escape, some are scorched, and many are burnt to the bone.

The boy finds himself amongst boys of his own age precocious beyond any belief. Of the mysteries in which he has himself walked furtively, with strained and eager eyes and a blush, there is no symptom whatsoever. There is nothing mysterious or that calls for blushes to those others. To them the only thing at all mysterious is the English outlook, which makes still possible the power to blush. For them, they walk as a matter of course in and out of doors thrown blatantly open, which in England from time immemorial have been locked and sealed and guarded by dragons,—and since so far neither mystery or locks, or keys or dragons have saved the youth of England or done anything at all but turn them into a nation of hypocrites!—A shrug says the rest.

And eighteen with a moustache of its own, that knows everything, is an object brilliant with all the glamour of novelty, and his arguments carry weight.

Even if he accepts all this, if he accepts conditions, however inimical to his upbringing, and works in the way of the others, and gets on at last to University or Technical School, it is even then all very cold and lonely for an English-bred youth.

The Professors, incarnate intellects, embodied for the most part in German Jews, are sublimely, awfully impersonal. No heart throbs in the great University where strangers come and go, and are forgotten.

The warmth and love, not only for learning, but for those who learn within their walls, that mellows the very air of our ancient Universities and reacts upon the brains and hearts and souls of their children, turning them for ever back towards the old grey mother, is unknown in the great Swiss seat of learning. Here the intellect reigns supreme. Largely, generously, severely, she rules in the spacious rooms, bestowing triumphantly her cold gifts. Youth comes full of hope and expectancy and with a great desire for things greater and higher and more marvellous than intellect can ever supply. He leaves with his facts in his head and his diploma in his pocket, and nothing else but an aching desire never to look again upon the face of his Alma Mater. The rigid rule of pure Intellect has chilled the heart and soul in him, has dulled even his powers of gratitude. He has no tenderness towards her who has given him all things but her heart.

This withheld heart is not confined to the great and generous University of Zürich. It chills the very air for every stranger within the streets of this lovely city of gardens. The Zürcher accepts him after careful police inspection. After that he leaves him alone. The Zürcher lives for himself and is more than sufficient unto himself. He keeps his heart and his tongue to himself. This born bourgeois is the most exclusive creature upon earth.

The Englishman, with all his insular wrappings, the instant he perceives a potential Englishman in any other, no matter what land bred him, will never be contented until he has given him the freedom of both heart and home. For being one with him upon some plane that was before God divided the nations, he withholds nothing. And if he does put this plane of Great Happenings upon English soil how little it matters !

Friends who might have stood aside for ever have met

and mingled in this holy place. The true Zürcher would die rather than behold a potential Zürcher not born and bred upon his own little cabbage patch, under like conditions to himself. This model parish in the midst of a wild earth, likes things it can understand and classify. It sits proudly behind its closed doors, and the stranger comes and goes. He leaves nothing behind him, and he takes nothing with him of all the things that matter. He is neither welcomed nor missed.

There are well-regulated minds of all nations, of course, who care not one jot for all this. There are English men and women who can live for long years quite content outside closed doors, so firmly bound up in their little Island around the Church that they never want to storm their way into the doors shut in their faces.

But the one door so recently shut in her own face, had given Mary a nervous revolt against any other closed door that shut her out of anything. And to be shut out of a whole City into one little Island round the Church, fairly infuriated her.

She liked the Island and everything in it. It was new and extremely kind; but those villas on the hills of woods and vines in their scented gardens eternally judging and condemning her, worse still, making an end of her so far as they were concerned, alternately exasperated and fascinated her.

It was utterly ridiculous! She laughed and derided herself but it made no difference. Mary resented violently the attitude of the villas.

"It's not so much now," she said, "but there's nothing to go home for. I'll probably stay out here when Oliver goes to school, and to be standing outside doors shut in your face for—for thirty years perhaps! I shall never feel properly warm on the hottest day in this so-far-shalt-thou-go-and-no-farther place."

"Oh, Oliver," she said, as he ran up with his hoop one day they were out together, "think of all the children in all those houses you'll never know."

"An' none in the English houses, all the ladies there

is too busy to have 'em," said Oliver, poking his face between the twisted bars of a beautiful gate. "Oh ! Oh ! Oh ! an' two swings up in the corner."

"And not one of the children who swing on them will ever know you," said Mary, her eyes thrilling in the joy of him.

Until she had him here away from everything, the only thing left to her of all her life, Mary's fears for his sex had stood between her and Oliver, half hiding him. Now she could see nothing else but Oliver, and sometimes he stood between her and all her fears.

"What utter, utter idiots of mothers," rapped out Mary.

"Why?" inquired Oliver, round-eyed with astonishment.

"To let such a chance as you go by! Come on, little beloved. It's horribly rude of us to be glaring in. We shouldn't dream of doing it in England. It's just like them to betray us into doing things we'd be ashamed of at home."

"Is they all poor idjits?" inquired Oliver with some solicitude.

"No, Oliver. They're all as wise as owls. I was an idiot myself to say that. The only foolish thing they've ever done in their horrible respectable lives is to keep you from playing with their little children."

Here Oliver broke loose and fled back for another last look.

"Three chillen—an' all boys. An' wid some of the ladies in d'oder houses too big for chillen, an' d'oders too little. An'—oh! Mummy, couldn't you have some more quick—if we can't get in."

"Oh, Oliver, I couldn't."

"Couldn't you ask Daddy to send some in a ship?"

"I couldn't do that either."

Oliver sighed.

"I'll ask the ladies," he said at last thoughtfully, narrowing his eyes to review the material at his disposal. "Some of 'em isn't so very big. Dey might try."

"It's no use, little beloved. They couldn't either. We've all lost our chances."

Oliver turned it over in his mind for a minute or so. He had thought out many things in his little life, and had come to many conclusions. It was only the things she thought bad for him that Mummy ever refused to give him. But she wanted him to have children. She wanted it just as much as he did. Oliver always knew just how much Mummy wanted things.

And yet why could none of them give him what not one of them disapproved of and he wanted all the time? Not Mummy, nor Daddy, nor the ladies, and they all loved him, Mummy and Daddy and the ladies.

Oliver could make nothing at all of it. It was perversity, pure and simple.

"An' chillen behind all them gates," he said at last, pausing to peer through another. "Mummy! Come home to England where the gates is open."

"But I can't do that, little beloved. I came out here to find out what the people who know all about the opening and shutting of gates can tell me, and I haven't even begun yet. I can't begin till October, when the big place I showed you where I'm going every day to find out wonderful things opens. I'll tell you all about them as I go along."

"Will you find out how to open de gates wid chillen behind 'em?" inquired Oliver.

"Perhaps I shall," said Mary recklessly. "And in the meantime, perhaps someone with children will come to the Hotel."

Here was hope indeed! After that Oliver lost no opportunity. He watched with strained eyes from every coign of vantage for new arrivals, and although quite reconciled to the gentle rule of his young Fräulein in ordinary affairs, here her restraining influence ceased.

Oliver was as one with a mission to perform. Laws were as nothing to his high purpose. The minute a new arrival appeared on the horizon, he gave a little skip and crowed under his breath. He eluded his guardian with the

suave slipperiness of a diplomat, or this being impossible, broke from her control to reach his goal. Ancient, elderly, middle-aged, on the verge,—no one escaped Oliver.

Until he learnt better, Oliver was somewhat indiscriminate in his attacks, demanding hostages to fortune from the most unlikely objects. Scowls, remonstrances, even ridicule, left his zeal untouched, but he acquired wisdom in practice and soon began to differentiate. Where children seemed but a remote chance, he began presently to demand grandchildren, and now all the fat was in the fire. Chaste vestal virgins who had kept their figures, and less fortunate ones who had not, poured sour counsel and dark prophecy upon Oliver's mother. Giggers went giggling upstairs and down, and why he shouldn't demand grandchildren from likely people became one of the problems of Oliver's short life.

In time, finding that direct attack upon the bigger ladies was apt to give offence, Oliver took to biding his time.

From his corner he would now survey the material at his command, and having selected a probable provider, he would generally end in getting into her lap. Having next satisfied himself that she was as soft as she looked, with a sigh and a cuddle Oliver would proffer his request.

Many sweet young eyes filled as Oliver demanded his rights in her, and there and then promised her heart that she would never fail him. For even to look at Oliver in this gentler mood was to feel the crown of womanhood already hovering over one's head.

But where are girls, there also are boys. One day Oliver got his ears soundly boxed by the sweetest girl of them all, and nothing would induce him to tell even his mother why he cried himself to sleep that night. It was his first little essay in chivalry, and it made even greater the eternal puzzle for the little knight errant.

"The grandmother people glare at you, an' the chillen ones box your ears, an' yet de tings you wants isn't naughty tings, an' dey all want 'em as much as you."

Of this Oliver had a solemn conviction that nothing

could move. Mary knew better than to attempt to move it, and besides she felt too guilty to try. But Fräulein was a well brought-up girl and betrothed to a pastor more circumspect even than herself. So she ventured upon remonstrance, but Oliver just looked past her to his own firm belief, and devised new means to the old end.

So occupied and absorbed did he become, and so great were his difficulties even with ladies made for 'em, that Oliver's little head often ached, and sometimes he did not want his dinner. And the only thing then to do was to let Fräulein go out with her pastor, and for Mary and Oliver to make a little expedition together to the closed gates, to watch for the children who never came. There was to Mary in those indecorous vigils an aching note of infinite sorrow, but to Oliver they brought back hope. And then suddenly one day an American family dropped from Heaven upon the Hotel with three children, all nature's own, and naturally fiends incarnate, and before the day was out, Oliver had ceased from harrying the dovecots, and was the most fiendish of the lot, and Mary laughed and blessed God.

So much for Oliver's first little excursion into the pain of life!

Mary found a good deal to think over. She had laughed and rejoiced in Oliver when ladies of all ages, no matter how tender the love they bore him, had fled at his approach, but she had cried too, bewildered, blinding, irrational tears.

She had done right,—she had!—she had waited for the perfect birth, before she would tempt Fate.

They weren't ready, she and Oliver. What stood between them might spoil a life as so many were spoilt,—and then they took their terrible revenge, they hit back and hurt and spoilt other lives.

Oliver—ah! she had not begun to be afraid when Oliver came—not properly,—and he had been perfect in spite of her.

And now all her other children, perfect or imperfect, were gone from her. Mary felt unutterably lonely.

She had always despised women who wept and did nothing. But what was she to do or to undo that mattered?

In a month she would be busy enough wrestling with difficult subjects in a strange tongue—no one could accuse her then of idleness, but her day of real doing was at an end.

It was perhaps in the bitterness of Oliver's vain appeals for "chillen" that Mary first began to weaken upon the pinnacle of her high desire. The sad eyes and the plain speaking of the little governess had given her a shake indeed, and made her sit gingerly for fear of further rude assault, but it was Oliver who made her feel extremely like toppling over altogether. She was too lonely for her years and she resented the isolation. She wanted by her own free gifts to draw nearer to the world.

Oliver?—Oliver was given,—she had not desired him,—he was no real gift of hers to the world! She wanted to leave more behind her when she lay lonely in her grave.

And at her age—to be finished. To be doing work, wearing herself out with work no longer in the least personal. To be outside everything. Nothing was hers, not even Oliver really. She had sometimes looked upon Oliver as an inadvertence! She had blamed herself for Oliver!

She walked alone, out of touch with the past, and the present, and the future. With none of the three could she ever now link up. Her work for the world was done. What she did now she did for herself.

Mary shivered, and shrank, and covered her face.

CHAPTER VII

MANY a time since he married Mary, had Oliver Mirrilies found himself wishing that he had had the luck to be born without any intellect at all, a well-grown, well-intentioned fool, with muscle. It would have simplified life for both of them.

Even in lesser matters being a fool at full pitch would have suited Oliver very well. There were warring elements in Oliver Mirrilies that had always given him a lot of trouble. Even as a boy passing examinations as by magic, he had already begun to resent the iron rule of an intellect that would never let him off, that drove him literally at the point of the sword into using it at every turn, and so getting on ahead of the others before he knew where he was. With such an instrument at his disposal, and a mother who lived for his success in examinations, Oliver would have felt a rotter had he not used it to some purpose. Moreover the masters were decent enough chaps in their way, and seemed to depend on him. Besides it was sport of sorts to romp through things that floored other fellows.

Oliver had no real grudge against his intellectual powers, he could have put up with them all right if, backed by his mother and the masters they hadn't made the Royal Engineers a foregone conclusion.

The half of Oliver not exceptional ability longed with all its might to rollick into the Cavalry as his father and his grandfather had done before him, and the part of him that wanted this always seemed to Oliver the larger half, and the half he liked best. It was tremendously

alive, and could enjoy itself down to the ground, and this sort of thing he felt might be considered out of place in a Sapper ; besides he could not see how he could possibly get in enough Polo in that serious Corps.

He had no intrinsic dislike to being a Sapper. He liked sharpening his wits on anything, it didn't much matter what, but there was the chance of being often alone, or worse still of being boxed up in a small station bound hand and foot to a brace or so of prigs for months at a stretch perhaps. So long as one had decent work to do, the life of a Sapper was probably the best of the lot, but with a dull job and the society of prigs, and horses a mere incident of the day's work, not part and parcel of it, the thought of his inevitable career often fell like an extinguisher on Oliver.

Oliver was possessed of a flaming outlook on things in general, as rapacious and assertive as the exceptional abilities, and it was always breaking in and upsetting things. He suffered more from divided personality than most boys.

He suffered more than anyone ever knew, for the oldest aim in him, older than any of his own personal desires, was not to distress his mother more than was absolutely necessary.

She was a gentle, patient, good woman, who had borne her sufferings with such quiet repressed force, that they reverberated now in the big house in Cromwell Road, as they had reverberated for many years through half the stations in Bengal. She could sit calm and smiling, upright and well-dressed, alone with her sorrow for ever, the only expression of her emotions an angel's power of song. Mrs. Mirrilies was a woman above melodrama, but in one plangent note she could betray her heart and stir a stone.

Each new infidelity of her husband's was the precursor of a new song from Mrs. Mirrilies. Floating out in the twilight upon the listening Compound from the sufferer - alone at her piano, each note, as it came, sounded like a benediction lightly touched with the Communion Service.

If ever a man was made to suffer for his sins from the magnanimity of his wife it was Colonel Mirrilies.

"If she'd fly at me, use language, divorce me, or even pray for me," he would groan in the silence of his soul—"but to be singing at me there, like an Angel from Heaven."

But if Colonel Mirrilies suffered, so also did Jean his wife. She suffered dreadful things in that Cavalry Regiment, and Oliver was practically brought up on them.

The two little memories of India that seemed to include all the others for Oliver were sitting on the verandah watching the stars coming out in the dusky velvet evening sky till they spread like a cloth of silvered gold above the world, and listening to his mother's voice from the dark room behind, pouring out trills of liquid pain.

Or when the chill was in the air and the smell of wood fires rose up like incense in his nostrils and flames danced in his eyes, and in his heart broke the bitter cry of a helpless woman.

The quality in the music was superb and must have melted the heart of any child who loved music and his mother as Oliver did.

It was the echo of those songs that made him, in the end, give up the Cavalry and enter Woolwich.

Thus it was that a gentle woman as acutely civilized as a fiddle-string: too great to complain, too sweet to resist, had her way with two men endowed above their kind with the primitive power of passion. For to the one she made death, in spite of the distractions of life, easy. In the end Colonel Mirrilies was glad to go.

To the other she made life just about as difficult as even she could have wished.—She had seen enough of what an easy life may bring a man and his wife to.

"One could stick it all better," Oliver Mirrilies was now thinking as he stood watching the last of England, "if one were going out to enjoy oneself—among horses say—but—hard work?—The consolations of hard work seem to break down when you find yourself in a tight place. Even the thought of it only makes your own worries stand out the sharper."

He turned away from England and fell to considering the immediate past.

Oliver was impulsive enough much too often for his comfort. In this the Cavalry had often got the better of the Scientific Corps, but in the present arrangement of his life he had not acted upon impulse. It was a deliberate throw of the dice. Half measures or passive resignation to anything forced upon you against your will were both incomprehensible to Oliver.

If Mary's theories or mode of life were wholesome or natural, or gave her any real enjoyment or were ever likely to do either her or anyone else a penn'orth of good —he would have stuck it and waited, knowing the inevitable end.

He could have waited seven years,—or seventeen,—for Mary. But Mary's heart seemed to him to be the cat's paw of some weird perversion, and it would have been sheer waste of good time to stand round watching the vagaries of an intellect.

He had waited already, passive enough considering everything ; he was going to act now. Now he would win or lose. He would have the whole of Mary or none of her. They would fulfil life together to the uttermost, or go their divergent ways, and make the best of what was left,—failures both.

No one could ever replace Mary for him. And though, so far only sure of Mary's discreet affection, he knew as surely as he knew every shallow of this chaste esteem, that he was the only man living for Mary.

And now he was out on a great adventure and had forced a woman weaker than himself, out alone upon the same strange and stormy sea.

So far as the storms that blow about women were concerned, he had the utmost confidence in Mary's power to weather these. Mary's dangers were of another order, he wished to God that his own were. In most of the deliberately chosen actions of his life, Oliver believed himself to have counted the cost.

He paused now, looking back at England still in full

view, to wonder if in the two instances of his mother and Mary, he had really done so.

Yes, he had, he decided. He had paid his price for both, and they were both worth it. He could never have made the best of any life with a gentle woman singing songs in the twilight full of pain of his making, who had already sung so many of another man's making, and there could only be one woman in the world for him and that was Mary. Mary was his and he was hers, and in the end they'd meet.

Meanwhile, there were only too many women only too ready to be an obstacle in his path and Mary's. Oliver was honestly afraid of them. He knew too much of them and of himself. He knew too much of the untamed and untamable part of him that, Mary or not, would leap to meet their wildness.

It was all a puzzle beyond solving to Oliver, sinister, immense, God's puzzle for man, since God had woven it into the warp and woof of His world.

Perhaps, on the whole for a man of his tendencies and profound ignorance, it were better left to God,—that man must see the Eternal riddle as God sees it before he can solve it. Sometimes he had paused with a laugh to watch the futile efforts of the eager-hearted, their futile clutches at the vast subject, more especially Mary's little efforts, but having laughed he hurried on in a panic. The thing was so big and awful. This thing that made and unmade worlds, eternally co-operating in construction and destruction, was such worlds apart from Mary's chaste and dutiful affection.

The only time in which Oliver was ever a coward was when he stood in the presence of this eternal puzzle, and of the eternal feminine, its symbol. He was afraid of his very life of women, and especially of women in India, where the native wildness comes more readily to the call of the wild, than in any other land on earth.

In that fierce land where men have scaled higher heights, and fallen to deeper depths, than any have done since, where mysteries, illimitable, antique, of which no man

may speak lurk in the quiet of waste places, where a great fatigue falls upon the spirit, it is not good for man to be alone. So knowing India and women and himself, Oliver Mirrilies was afraid of his very life. For India was his destination and he could not do without women. He was too positively a man. He wanted things from them no man could supply, little trivial everyday things, that only men who have reached a certain stage of development find essential to their best work.

No one was less of a ladies' man than Oliver. Never in all his life had he hung round women's rooms, and he thought of them as little as he could, and rarely spoke of them.

Even as a boy he had forged on cheerfully, held his tongue, and kept his mind fixed as much as possible to work and play.

Work and play and human effort are, however, only palliatives. The ultimate force still presses on, and the magic that goes forth from a woman is as positive as the fragrance of her hair, all part of the one great power, and as necessary to the making of the world, as to the development of the man open to its influence,—the man who must have everything. Oliver, for his sins, was open at every pore, and the magic is sometimes white and sometimes it is black. Captain Mirrilies knew both varieties, and he shook in his shoes.

A station without a woman in it was anathema to him. He would inevitably get dull and listless there, and do his work mechanically. The want of women in their environment is fatal for those men who must have completeness. It depletes and devitalizes the very air they breathe, robs it of half its quality, shears it of half its strength.

And yet a station *with* women!

For a minute he could think of no woman alive but Mary, and this was profitless. He tore his heart from England and set his mind to what lay before him. He had counted the cost. He wasn't going back on his own deliberate adventure, but it was a pretty desperate one for a man of his make.

"I'll be murmuring and muttering of 'the long, long Indian day,' next—and after that—Good Lord!" said Oliver to the last white cliff, now a shadowy ghost of a thing that crisped the hair under his grey cap.

It was just at this moment that Mrs. Quayle came up.

"You?" she said, frankly delighted. "And Mary? And Oliver the Less?"

"Mary and Oliver the Less would be too much of an anxiety in Dera Ismail Khan we decided, so they are going to drift about a bit. My mother wants them to stay with her, but I don't think they will just yet. Their plans weren't wheeled into line when I left."

"Oliver will arrange it all. He always did with the ayahs and the cooks—but his grandmother will miss Oliver and Mary, won't she?"

"She will miss them," said Oliver after the pause of a second, "and she would have liked to present Mary. She looks upon that sort of thing as part of the divine order, and Mary as a grass-widow on her own as rather on the outer edge of it: but one woman who counts, is quite enough always about a boy, two might be a bit overmuch. I'm rather glad they're going to drift and sample new sensations."

"You believe a lot in influences, Captain Mirrilies?" she said suddenly.

"I do, for my sins. There might be cases in which I could wish I didn't."

He almost laughed as he found himself thinking half aloud to this kind quiet woman. She was one of the few women he knew who would let you, as a matter of course, forget her, and think of yourself all the time you were talking to her. It was her especial characteristic, so far as he could remember. She gave excellent dinners into the bargain, was apparently fond of her husband, and indefatigable in his service in a gentle unobtrusive way. Otherwise—

He paused and things came drifting back. There were three little children who had died one after the other in a curious, vague, unnecessary sort of way,—and upon

their heels other faint memories seemed to be etching themselves out upon the mist of years. A silent shy girl growing into a woman even more silent, a pretty delicate face steadily fading, a slender willowy figure stooping a little more, blue eyes very much aware and interested becoming absent and a little furtive.

They were so interested and aware he remembered when first she came, that they had interested him to the extent of recommending Mary to see if she couldn't make something out of the poor little thing so unfit for India, but Mary had apparently found her rather hopeless, for except as an object of consolation, the effort seemed somehow to have dropped. Oliver couldn't remember having thought once of Mrs. Quayle since he had last seen her.

She was standing on her verandah, alone as usual, she hadn't many friends, and when Mary and he turned round to wave her a last good-bye, she was still watching them. Then remembering the dead babies he had felt sorry for the mother, and had said something about it to Mary, and Mary had acquiesced with a little subtle intonation in her beautiful voice and, with a softening of her still more beautiful eyes, had said that she was afraid Barbara would have brought them up in the sort of dropped-hands way that was growing on herself. Mary was just then bubbling over with theories on education. And then they had both forgotten her.

After looking back at the little woman they had strolled on down the nullah where once they had had a merry adventure together.

Memories so intimately bound up in Mary made Oliver look more attentively at Mrs. Quayle, and it struck him that she looked very well. Something—probably English air,—had brought back the delicate beauty of her complexion. She was not quite so thin as when he had last seen her. Her eyes were still rather shy. That, however, was nothing to her discredit after a few years in India. And—now that he took the trouble to look at her, her eyes were really rather unusually bright. If they could look as bright as that after Mary's, something plainly

must have happened to her. He looked at her with some curiosity and wondered what on earth it could be. It was difficult to imagine anything happening to Mrs. Quayle that could possibly brighten her eyes. That sort of thing doesn't happen somehow to that sort of woman.

For the first time in her life Mrs. Quayle really surprised Captain Mirrilies. For a minute or so he could hardly get over it. It almost lifted itself to the dignity of a problem in his mind. But that in connection with Mrs. Quayle was—almost humorous. His eyes twinkled a little as he lit a cigarette, and asked for Major Quayle.

"I knew, of course, that he was going shooting in Manchuria, but I thought he meant to go home afterwards and join you."

"No. He met Colonel Lomax and they went up country. They had splendid sport."

"Sure to have, Quayle is a splendid shot. Well, I'm here and I hope you'll make use of me. I'll be glad of honest work. Not a very promising looking crowd on board. I say, is that your chair? What's put it there? Let me fix you up."

In the leisurely, competent way of a good traveller he established her in great comfort in the best nook on the ship, and went off on his own affairs.

"Might have been very much worse," he told himself, as he stowed away his belongings. "Don't suppose you'd find a safer woman in India. And on the whole I doubt if she's the bore we thought her, although we never liked to say it on account of the babies. And,—any way,—she has wit enough to admire Mary—up to her lights of course.—Still a subdued light you can turn off when you like is better than to be sitting under a glare of gas for eighteen days."

For some minutes after he had gone Mrs. Quayle sat very still. She steadied her blue eyes on her open book, she clasped her hands under the rug and did her best not to shake. She was a woman who had had an exhaustive training in quiet effort, and very soon she sat so still that the very air about her seemed to be hushed.

"To let him come out alone and for three years," she said to herself at last, her eyes quite still on her book—"that man! Is Mary mad?—or—doesn't she understand—anything?—because she can't love—a man like that? She doesn't even love him enough to know that he wants to be taken care of,—and to be proud that he does. If she knew, she'd despise him for wanting care. That's Mary! If she knew I knew, she'd put it down to my evil mind, contracted from contact with Frank,—or want of education. And to know all that Mary knows and not to know that it's the precious things of life that want protecting, not the things no one wants,—like me. Mary does not love him as much as she would a prize dog, or she wouldn't send him out into a den of thieves. Oh! I hate the innocence of the ignorant! Every single thing that makes hay of a man or woman is a sealed book to Mary. She just leaves it sealed and judges men and women by her own highly educated self. What's everything to the world is nothing to her. She just walks past and condemns."

She looked back at the mists that hid England, and straight ahead into a fierce blaze of merciless heat full of terrors. Barbara Quayle had many bitter memories and but few hopes, but her heart was warm with a great love, and an infinite desire to serve,—and no one had ever wanted her service! It seemed so odd to this born server, for humble in all else, she knew well the splendid power of service that lay latent and unwanted within her aching heart.

"I think I could have given,—oh! well—not everything," she said presently—"to Frank,—if he had only wanted it—but he didn't. He only wanted children for the two properties—and all *they* wanted, I think, was to die. I'd like to do something for someone—I don't think I can go on much longer if I can't. One gets so deadly tired of never being wanted.—And to do something,—any least little thing,—for Oliver so that he'd never even suspect.

"Oh! God," she said, with her blue eyes upon the

dancing waters, "I do so wish I could do something. And for the first time in my life I'm glad I don't look in the least like what I am, what I could be,—what I was meant to be, I think,—that I'm insignificant and unwanted—and a bore.—But I won't be a bore,—ever again," she thought with sudden passion; "they can stick all the other disqualifications, but no man living could stand a bore! and then how could one do anything for him? and even without being a bore I can do dragon over the treasure of another woman, and all the other little things I couldn't even dare to think of doing if I were anyone else but me. One can do a great deal," she sighed, "when one has been of no account for six years, and is known all over India in the character. One can do most things,—and men are all the creatures of habit."

Thus inflated with the missionary spirit, Mrs. Quayle grew in courage and confidence, and the sea air suited her. There were a singularly unattractive and unenterprising company of ladies on board, so as a dragon her services were hardly required, but there are a thousand preliminaries to the practice of a rôle so delicate, and Mrs. Quayle was as discreet as she was zealous. She never thought of herself in the matter at all in fact, except when the pain throbbing in all the ways of her going grew too great to be any longer ignored, then to the best of her ability, she put her own house in order, and having done so, resumed her patient watch upon Oliver's threshold.

Oliver found the voyage less of a bore than he could have dared to hope, and told Mary in more than one letter that little Mrs. Quayle was quite coming out, and as kind as ever in her quiet way.

* * * * *

Her slight but promising knowledge of life seemed to have been beaten into Barbara Quayle by a succession of curious little shocks. The first was the amazing difference between her dream of Captain Quayle and the crass reality of that officer and gentleman. From this she recovered considering her age and inexperience, in an

undemonstrative silence very creditable to her. Captain Quayle was a fact to feel, not to discuss.

Her silence, however, cut her off from many who might have been her friends. The victim who dilates upon her woes to sympathetic advisers under the seal of secrecy is always more interesting than the dumb dog. If a woman hasn't so much as a woe to contribute to a Station, she soon drops out.

Then came the deadly, deadening shocks of the fading out of her babies one by one. They just looked out at life, and in at her sad heart, and couldn't stand either, so they went elsewhere to look for happiness.

She used often to wonder as she sat alone on the verandah under the great lucent stars, if perhaps she could not have kept them had her heart been only a little more gay.

Her habit of blaming herself for everything had always made things much worse for Barbara.

The most shattering shock of all fell upon her the day when quite suddenly and unexpectedly she discovered that she loved Oliver Mirrilies with her whole heart.

It was a few days after the death of the third baby. Mary had been kind in the kindest way, but there had been a certain sense of learning experience in it, and a slight touch of disapproval,—well-regulated babies ought not to die off like that.

“As though I didn't know that myself,” poor Barbara had thought. It was just then that she found out Mary and was immensely astonished. It precipitated the shock no doubt.

In the kindness of Oliver there was no wish to acquire experience, and no disapproval. She had lost what he was longing for, the children Mary owed him, the debt she refused to pay and he to claim. His kindness to the bereaved woman was full-blooded enough. There was a certain passion in it.

Barbara did not misunderstand in the least. She was too pure at heart and too close to the sources of sorrow for that, but for one instant she stood upon the brink

of the sources of joy in a great light which showed her all things.

Then she returned to the keeping of her house and to quiet repentance, for she was a woman persistent in her duty. She had been repenting in a patient reasonable way ever since. There was no hysteria about Barbara, she was only rather too old-fashioned in the ways of a world that has somehow got the bit between its teeth and has run wild.

But now that the chance to do something definite both for Mary and for Mary's husband had so unexpectedly come into her life, it seemed to her that service in the sheer nature of things, must be better than repentance, so she decided to slip quietly into action and to leave repentance to take care of itself, and above all to keep on being thankful beyond words that she was so utterly harmless.

CHAPTER VIII

MEANWHILE Mary was gathering in knowledge and attracting a great deal of attention. She had come to look round, and find out, and it was no use waiting for big events in a select little Island hemmed in by the shut doors of a haughty people, so she took part in everything that came her way, and found it a rest from her labours at the University and her French and German lessons. She went to the dances, and joined the sewing parties, she had even begun with great patience, to learn to knit. A charitable lady, however, perceiving the turning of a heel to be altogether beyond her powers gave her a piece of canvas and some substance manufactured to look like silk, and showed her how to make sprawling yellow spiders with black points on the canvas. Presently she became an expert in the art and could listen undisturbed to the conversation that went on around her. It was a relief often after a strenuous morning of Psychology, delivered with the inexorable precision of a machine.

For, simple perhaps beyond any other nation in life and often in heart, the natural and ineradicable tendency of the Teuton, in order no doubt to rob his theme of none of the pomp and ceremony proper to its dignity, is to make his subject as difficult as he knows how. It is only the German Poet who ever speaks as his heart feels. The philosopher takes care to hide his heart and even his thought, in great swelling words. Mary knew it to her cost and for relief listened with all her ears to the pleasant outpourings of the ladies.

They were unattached people mostly, widow-women and spinsters of a discreet age, but they all loved children, and Oliver with Fräulein in tow was sometimes permitted to come into the sumptuous teas provided by all the ladies in turn. Nothing Mary liked better than to see him, tall and straight and slim, going round the circle like the scent of a Spring flower. He always looked upon these occasions as though he were made for no other purpose than to freshen up hearts a little tired with the monotony of the years.

Oliver could always accommodate himself to any company. A demon with demons, he was a cherub from above with the elect, and nothing escaped him. He pondered many things in his heart, and brought them out afterwards at awkward moments.

The ladies taught Oliver to hold skeins of wool, and talked on over his golden head amiably of the weather, earnestly of the Church, more gravely still of their servants, and whispers might be caught by those with ears to hear that were lurid with meaning. These concerned the various vagaries of vanished chaplains. They always wound up with a whispered pæan of praise for him now present with them.

Mary at first felt a certain nervousness as to how the Cause-of-rejoicings wife would take it, but her qualms on this score were soon set at rest. This lady having a strong sense of humour, and a sound training in English Continental Colonies, took it in precisely the right spirit.

The ladies also discussed embroidery, plain sewing and such other safe subjects as railway accidents, the perils of the sea, or mountain ascensions, and then all went well.

The oldest inhabitant was as genial and approachable as the latest arrival. It was only when an opinion or a thought with any touch of individual outlook that deflected in any way from the trend of the minds there present was adventured, that the air became overcharged and danger threatened. Nothing tangible ever came of it, the elders of the community were women too great and good to convey their disapproval through the common

medium of speech. Each simply drew her chair slightly aside and froze to her seat, at the same time freezing everybody else. Icicles twinkled as by magic in the mild air. The effect was quelling in a remarkable degree.

Mary was becoming rather susceptible to it.

When for the first time in her experience the hush fell, she looked round in a panic, and seeing the congealed, sequestered, images still sewing hard, a great weakness fell upon her, and a horrible desire to scream or to say "Boo," or giggle; to do anything in short to disenchant the bewitched circle, or even to discover the quarter whence proceeded the alien note. That from the frozen ladies' point of view it is always rather indecent to give little bits of yourself away, she was already beginning to discover. Even if they slip out in spite of you because people have been so kind to you that you want to give them the best you have at the moment, it doesn't do.

With those bred in the hard rule of the Victorian era to keep yourself to yourself is the inexorable order. To give your personality, your vitality; to let any human eye discern whither your trend of thought really leads, to give of the precious things that concern the world as nearly as they do yourself, to share your spirit with any of them, is almost as loose and licentious a tendency as to go round offering your virtue to the public on easy terms.

"'Ware emotion!" put classically was the heart's cry of the Victorian.

It was an atmosphere peculiarly trying just now to Mary so full of varying emotions that seemed all to matter not only to her, but to everybody else. She wanted to be near people who had lived, and loved, and borne children, and lost them; who had managed or mismanaged husbands, or done without them. They must all have such crowds of information to give away, and one could make such a lot out of it, and perhaps give it back in a way that would make it quite new and delightful. All this and more went floating round Mary's mind as she made rather futile dabs at a spider; the sinister hush somehow made her feel nervous.

She looked round again rather resentfully to try to discover the person guilty of the unworthy word, when she became suddenly aware that it was she herself. She, of all people was the sinner who had worked the spell !

She paused to think and remembered that almost without knowing it she had let something slip out that was quite peculiar to herself,—something that was very pleasant and young, as young nearly as Oliver, she reflected, as she watched him with amused eyes, his hand on a frozen lap. And its one and only effect, was to freeze all the elders of the congregation to their seats !

Mary was honestly aghast, but a girl quick at the "uptake." Her first duty clearly was to unfreeze the pillars of the Church, so being courageous if nothing else, she went over steadily smiling to the oldest inhabitant, sat metaphorically at her feet and for ten solid minutes talked linseed poultices.

The suggestion was a happy one, its effect magical. When presently they drew in around the ample board, the character of Mary was, to a large extent, re-established.

Accidents, however, will occur in the best regulated families, and everyone hasn't the wit to apply linseed poultices on the instant to a sense of propriety that has fallen below zero from shock.

The very next week a lady made a "conquer or die" burst upon the quiet scene. She was a woman of character, militant in all things, and with a genuine gift of melodrama. She came from a young country full of energy and advance, the precocious child of the world. Mrs. Burden came laden more heavily than the Magi with gifts for effete civilization. They were good gifts, and she was determined to deliver them. Catch civilization or anything else freezing her out ! She had things to say that would do a played-out people no end of good, and hear them they should or she would know the reason why.

So she said them at length and in a deplorable accent, to the tea parties. She spoke, as one in authority on all matters in Heaven and earth. She rampaged round

Creation with a fine flare, and there were germs of truth in all her sayings. - She stirred civilization to its depths. The select little Island never felt so small in its life, but it had to listen to her.

The new points of view might be unpleasant, but being thrown with such vital force, they stuck.

Mary listened entranced.

The happy absence of humour in this product of yeasty youth, made the tea parties extremely entertaining.

In time they all yielded to the fiery influence of the new prophet, save one—the oldest inhabitant, and she would have sat frozen, speechless, and sewing to the crack of doom rather than give in to the lucubrations of anyone who could so far forget herself as to contradict you to your face.

It took even Mary's breath away to see Mrs. Burden, high-browed, calm, undaunted, her fine nose lifted, her rapt eyes aglow, giving a dramatic representation of the most scandalous of the modern frenzies in the very shadow of this solid front of old-established values.

To have remained uncontradicted for fifty years in a carefully tilled environment, only to be proved wrong at every point by this product of a virgin soil ! Above all to sit industrious, dumb and commentless in face as in bearing under the amazing ordeal, represented the iron heroism of a sterner time.

" If I had had the courage of either of them, of the old or the new," said Mary suddenly to herself, " I'd pick up Oliver the Less this minute, and go straight off to my other Oliver, and we'd fight it out together, and I wonder if he'd care,—at any rate he'll care less every day—now—and one makes no way at all single-handed. But I'm the wretched transition weakling and I can neither go back nor forward. I just wobble ; I suppose if you were Mrs. Burden with the eye of the world on you that nothing could stop you."

" Oh don't, please ! " entreated a gentle voice beside her, and to her astonishment Mary found that she had finished up aloud.

There was something very winning in the little woman who had spoken. She seemed to be always going about doing things for everybody, and bringing round flowers. It was her habit to wait, and watch, and observe, and Mary's occasional outbursts rather shocked her. She took them to be one of the symptoms of grass-widowhood, and if one appeared, no one could be quite sure that others might not follow. Besides Mrs. Mirrilies *wanted* nothing. She had everything anyone could want, husband, child, beauty and brains, and to give a few poor little flowers to anyone who could buy such enormous bunches for the decorations, would be absurd, so until now Miss Caldecott had unobtrusively adored Oliver, and quietly avoided his mother.

She saw a good deal in her quiet way, however, and as she was picking up another lady's stitches, Mary's face being just at the right angle for observation, she paused to look at it, and it seemed to her a little less remote from her accustomed point of view than she had at first feared, and she was always glad to give anyone the benefit of the doubt.

"I'm so glad you don't approve of suffragettes,—and things of that sort," she pursued, trying not to listen to Mrs. Burden, and feeling very nervous. She always found it difficult to make the first advance into new territory.

"But I neither approve nor disapprove, really. I just don't know."

Miss Caldecott's pupils sprang apart. She wished to goodness she hadn't begun, and that Mrs. Burden would stop.

"But—not to disapprove—of—of anything so awful as a suffragette!"

That the mother of an angel could not disapprove honestly of anything upsetting them all in the horrible way Mrs. Burden did pained her extremely.

"But if only I were properly convinced that they were awful," said Mary, with cheerful alacrity, "I'd disapprove for all I'm worth. I'd love disapproving.

I'd give anything to be a partisan, when I'm sure of my point of view. But when you've begun to wobble on points of view you've been quite cock sure of all your life, you can't start going solid on new ones: you must test them first. Do you think Mrs. Burden knows anything?" inquired Mary, jabbing at a spider's leg.

"I think she knows very little indeed, thank God."

"But she's sure she's right. That's the great thing. If I were sure I were right in anything, I could do—everything! It's dissipating your energy trying to find out, that keeps you unprogressive. It must be lovely to be quite sure and then just butt through. It's the spirit that's made England—and Mrs. Burden."

"Oh," said Miss Caldecott, loosening her grip on a stitch recovered after much patient plodding, and nearly dropping it again.

"But surely," said Mary, "England and Mrs. Burden are indispensable to human progress!"

"Mrs. Burden is not indispensable to our progress then," said Miss Caldecott with spirit, "and she'll give Mrs. Holmes a liver attack."

Mary nailed a spider to her knee, and looked at the oldest inhabitant.

"Oh! so that's what happens. Being too high-minded a Puritan lady for vain words, she goes home and gets a liver attack. She'd go to the stake in the same commentless way,—for a point of view!—Oh! if she does get a liver attack I'd love to nurse her. It's magnificent to get a liver attack or to go to the stake for something that perhaps doesn't matter in the least in the end. The only thing that matters in the least is believing down to the ground that it does matter,—it's being sure that makes you great."

In her absorption Mary prodded her knee, and awoke to Miss Caldecott's wide blue eyes trying to shelter her under their English wings.

"But—but it's the tribute of a wobbler to positive conviction," said Mary, aghast. "Oh! well, if you won't let me help nurse her, I'll be thrown back on Mrs.

Burden, if by any chance avenging Heaven should fall upon her: nothing less radical would have the slightest effect, and then you'll be sorry, for I'll be having a liver attack myself next."

"Then I'll nurse *you*," said Miss Caldecott with a ring of true joy in her voice.

"I should love you to nurse me, but I should hate to be ill."

"I'd like to do anything for you," said the little Moth breathlessly.

Mary looked at her. She looked so beautifully steadily good. She was such a rest!

"Then let me just now and then, say exactly what comes into my mind, to you. Suppressed emotions are very bad for you, if they get clotted enough they might give rise to internal inflammation. Don't look like that. It will only be like listening to the delirium of a patient. I've listened in India. You soon get used to it."

Miss Caldecott blushed, paused, and looked round cautiously.

"Please say anything you like to *me*, Mrs. Mirrilies, I'll understand,—at least, I'll never repeat a word. But please,—please be careful with the others. We're rather quiet people here, perhaps we're unprogressive and a little dull, and we've made up our minds long ago I think about all the things that really matter, and—"

She broke off short, and knitted.

"And perhaps I'll not have made up my mind about any of the things that really matter till the day of my death. A wobbling mind amidst fixed ones *must* be a stumbling-block and a rock of offence. I'd better wobble in future in my dressing-gown when Oliver is asleep, and to you at tea parties."

"Oh, Mrs. Mirrilies, just whenever you like."

"Well, when the symptoms get acute, I'll send for you.—There's a noble spider for you. You just look at it!"

"You're very clever, Mrs. Mirrilies, and these cushions always sell."

Mary paused and jabbed her needle into a spider's tail, while she gazed enviously at Mrs. Burden's eager back.

"It must be beautiful to be like that," she murmured, "even if you do bring on liver attacks, to be so aggressively, absolutely sure of yourself, so sure that you're absolutely right and everybody else absolutely wrong. If one has to spend one's whole life finding out what's worth loving or hating—why—there won't be any life left in the end to love or hate with."

"But one knows what one loves or hates," said Miss Caldecott nervously.

"But does one? That seems the difficulty to me."

"But you—you are so very fearless."

"Am I?—I wonder."

Miss Caldecott dropped a stitch and made an effort.

"Mrs. Mirrilies," she murmured, "you are very young and very pretty. You will be exposed to many dangers at these Lectures, and—whatever you do,—don't let any of those Slavs make friends with you."

"But," cried Mary, "I'm dying to know them—not all—but some. They're the most interesting of the lot and extremely exciting. The only trouble is they won't make friends with me."

"I'm thankful to hear it," said Miss Caldecott stiffly.

"But the women are so wonderful, and so are the men when they wash."

"Then I sincerely hope that those in your class will never wash," said Miss Caldecott cryptically.

"Two do," said Mary, "I have my eye on them."

"Dear Mrs. Mirrilies, speak lower."

"But surely they're not all unfit for publication?"

"I fear they are," she whispered breathlessly. "Indeed I know it, Mrs. Mirrilies—" she paused to blush dreadfully. "I'll tell you something,—please never speak of it,—Years ago, a cousin just out from home and I went for a walk one evening. We came to an Hotel where the students dance, and standing on the path above the house one could look right into the ball-room,

—we shouldn't have looked, but, oh! well we did. They danced so beautifully."

" You danced beautifully yourself," said Mary, glancing at the slight figure in which her merry eyes suddenly discerned a subtle suggestion of liteness and spring.

" I wasn't allowed to learn," she said, flushing more deeply, " but I could have danced. I wanted to so much. But I don't believe those people had ever to learn, they just danced as they walked. It was part of life for them. They couldn't have lived without it. When they were happy they just danced."

Mary was watching her with mounting interest, she looked so young, and so innocent.

" There was one girl especially who danced in a way I couldn't have imagined. She was dancing with a man.—If they'd been English I'd have been sure that he was a gentleman and she a lady. After their dance, they stood talking together in a window. It was dreadful to stare, but we did—it was so fascinating, and the bushes hid us,—and then he said something,—and she slapped him in the face."

" I daresay he deserved it," said Mary.

" Mrs. Mirrilies," she said sternly. " It was being Slavs. They do these things."

" But perhaps it's better than only thinking of doing them. I do like people who can bring their thought into action. Oh! don't be the least afraid I'd ever do it myself. By the time I'd have been ready to slap him in the face, the man would have escaped to repeat his offence on someone else, and another lost opportunity scored up against me ! "

" Mrs. Mirrilies, there's the Chaplain," she murmured warningly.

" He looks as human as anyone else. I daresay in his extreme youth if he had gone to a dance where Slav girls with their hair coiled up above their ears had danced his wits away, that he'd have deserved slapping as much as the Slav man."

" Oh, please—please—"

"But being English doesn't preserve you from every danger."

"It does from a great many. I'm glad that though I've lived abroad ever since I was eighteen, I feel so very, very English. I think I can honestly say that in all the years I have been here the feeling has never once left me."

She sighed with soft thanksgiving and started unravelling a heel, that in less competent hands had become a toe.

"Oh," said Mary, awestricken, "and I'd give anything,—but Oliver—and another person or so,—to be able to feel unEnglish enough on occasion to get into some member of every other nation I come across, just to see how he feels about things, and to remember every word of it and all the feelings, afterwards."

"Mrs. Mirrilies, you don't know what you're talking about, please forgive me, but thank God, you don't. The morals of the Slavs——"

"But," said Mary eagerly, "quite a short stay inside one might explain their morals, and how they got into the state they are, or if the state is just your own point of view; and it's the point of view, and not the morals that call for treatment."

"Please—a little lower."

"The nice human Chaplain who's been inside enthralled members of many nationalities,—or he wouldn't be the man he is—is tackling Mrs. Burden. I hope he'll take me next, for a rest, and then I'll be as English as unfortunately I am. I'm only hoping to be the other things,—and then I needn't speak any longer under my breath, need I?—Was I very delirious?" inquired Mary, suppressing an inclination to stretch.

"I'm afraid you were," said Miss Caldecott, with a slightly worn-out smile. "But I'll not say one word. I'm very safe."

"But I do wish to goodness you weren't, and would let out some of—your secrets—or other people's," said Mary unctuously; "I'm sure you're chock full of them."

She sighed restively as she thought of the tons of sup-

pressed information enclosed for the term of her natural life within that spare form. Nothing less than the judgment day would ever disgorge the mass.

"It's a beautiful spirit, I know. It's also the spirit—with the nicest difference, that made England, and the lady who says nothing, and gets liver attacks. I can't reach to it. I'd give anything to tap this congregation," she said with conviction—"any congregation really, to go from one congregation to another with a little lancet letting out all the news. One might cut all the psychological lectures then. It would teach you more than a thousand lectures, and spare you a thousand headaches. Ah! there's Mr. Gordon coming."

"It's quite time," said Miss Caldecott drily.

"It is, I think. It will be nice to talk to a man who's made the Grand Tour in the insides of all the nations, and can still look calm."

CHAPTER IX

IT was not until long afterwards that Mary could recognize as part and parcel of herself, the profound egoism of which a woman in a state of transition can be capable. Then she could look back at her tea party conversations, at home and abroad, with a laugh, and some contrition, not of a very acute order.

After all, selfish or not, she had inconvenienced no one. They were all very happy together, and to have a heart of gold always at the disposal of its friends in a sorrow of which no woman can speak is a great consolation.

An understanding friend would just then, have driven Mary crazy. One who helped her to understand herself, through the medium of her own halting, groping words made for sanity. But she wanted more mediums than one to keep pain at bay, and to find out things that perhaps had escaped her notice. Things that were also perhaps in Oliver the Greater, and might be cropping up in Oliver the Less next, and she didn't want to miss them this time.

Now moreover the most extraordinary thing was happening to Mrs. Mirrilies; her curiosity was growing rapacious, and was not by any means so delicately fastidious as it used to be. In India she had never permitted herself to be curious about anything but native customs. She had spent herself digging into these, and in the process had experienced some unpleasant surprises, but it seemed to her that the less one knew of the lives of the men and women of one's own race the better. They did not bear digging into. Besides she had quicker and less brutal methods of investigation at her disposal. One sensation

in regard to a man was always enough for Mary. She *felt* him and passed on. She had rarely been mistaken, and in the silence of her soul Mary plumed herself upon her gift. It had been much the same with women. If any woman in the Station was intimate with Mrs. Mirrilies it amounted to a hall mark of respectability, so to speak.

So in the midst of the swift rush of life she had walked sedate and unseeing past it, keeping her white robes clean, and now here in this little backwater of life she was restless with desire to see and to know everything ; to lure life itself into betraying all its secrets. It didn't even strike her now to think of her white robes at all ! She was too eager to know new things. She had a right to know them ; she knew so many old ones !

She had indeed a multitude of substantial facts at her fingers' end. Her eyes had seen, and her intelligence had understood them like that of many another intellectual woman, in a purely objective way. She had put all she had perceived, numbered and classified, into some watertight compartment within her own being and had sealed every outlet. She had never permitted any fact or any principle of which she had good reason to disapprove, to mix with the rest of life, to put forward any plea for its own existence, in fact to have any right at all in life.

If a prisoner did escape and run amok, then to catch him and clap him in again was one's first and bounden duty. To permit him to have any say in the matter, or to plead his own cause had always been beyond the moral conception of Mrs. Mirrilies.

Turn him out, convince him, reform him of course,—if you can ; but so long as he continues to retain the nature he started life with, keep him in solitary confinement and your own skirts undefiled.

Thus, when in the midst of it, Mary's intellect had shrunk from the consideration of life as a whole, but now something infinitely more intimate than the intellect was at work in her, egging her on to plunge into life, deep down in it, so that somewhere in its inscrutable depths possibly with all his points of view reorganized to meet

hers, she might find Oliver. Mary was only aware that she wanted to plunge—immensely.—Of the egoism of the woman in search of herself she knew nothing.

And yet profound egoist though she was in those days, Mary did not often pause to think of herself at all, except in connection with her more urgent object.

This state of conscious flux in herself, made her restive ; she was too young for her years, and all too pitifully remote from the high ideal of calm finish that floated always ahead of her.

It was in this mood that her roving longing eyes turned to the English boys learning life, and the Arts, and Sciences in the great cold University.

The English boys were ready and willing, and presently boys of other nationalities came drifting in, on sufferance at first, and with an apology on the part of the introducer as befits an Englishman in the making, but Oliver and argument soon made them all kin ; whilst Mary, hospitable now to every impression, and more eager than all the rest put together, made of her rooms a pleasant neutral territory where differences dissolved. That is, the differences that mattered, those common to their years and inexperience, swelled as many-mouthed instruments the nearer they got to Mary.

Mary conducted, so to speak, and the instruments blared, but she took good care that each had its full value in the wild spring-song of the nations, and her own head was often buzzing with new tunes.

A new atmosphere, sparkling like young wine, was in the air, and Oliver had the time of his life. He was answering to the word of command in a week, and at a more leisurely pace was learning not to bore his betters. Nothing like selfishness at its zenith for twisting it out of the raw beginner !

Mary was delighted. She had once feared the possibility of Oliver's becoming woman-bred.

Except Mary, who under the new educational influences often caught glimpses of her own bewildered folly, they were all as wise as owls, blinking and focussing their

eyes, and revealing life in its first promise. And out on her broad verandah with the little lovely city of gardens at their feet they smoked like furnaces.

Calamities occurred indeed. The kettle was often whisked over in the heat of argument, or the spirit ran out, but in the end the tea was always a dream and each felt that the general high level in the quality of the conversation was all due to himself. No one ever went out from Mary's small orgies without feeling that he had done credit to himself and his nation.

Mary sometimes wondered if she weren't spoiling them, but then she couldn't have got anything at all out of them if she hadn't, and she wanted everything ; so she decided to go on spoiling them for their good. Once, hundreds of years ago she used to do things also for Oliver's good, she remembered, but she had never spoilt him !

One day she and a select four were cutting a huge plate of bread and butter and all smoking hard ; Mary was too absorbed in the things that were slipping out of their *caches* to bar smoking over bread and butter,—as in her better moments she always did. She was too absorbed even to be shocked, which was worse, when the door opened, and the little White Moth floated in. Her pupils widened, and she dissolved back into the passage for one instant, then valorously advanced. Mary kept her head, and beamed a welcome.

But another lost opportunity was scrawled up against her on the phantom door. She had just been on the very verge of touching Oliver's hand across the seas, or perhaps his point of view, and she was certain the bread and butter was tobacco-flavoured.

For the first time in her existence, however, Miss Caldecott found herself suddenly caught up in the divine afflatus. She waved off the smokers, took over the bread and butter, and laid down the law about the cups.

After that she often came in, and took over all the preparations. And then she gave the lamb she designed to fold, still more ample opportunity for becoming all too intimately acquainted with the manners and customs

of the destroyer of the flock in its first crude state, when it lets out all its glory and all its shame at the right touch, because it has not yet learnt the virile art of dissimulation.

It was a great joy to the little Moth to guard Mary who so very plainly needed guarding. It never even struck her that if Mary weren't quite capable of guarding herself, at her age, all the dragons in creation would be of no avail.

But with the genus to which this amateur in dragonhood belonged the eventless years slip by so softly that the border line which divides the lamb from the sheep becomes so blurred in dreams, that many long stiffened into sober sheep, still gambol as lambs, and others are startled and shocked when they find this no longer possible. They put it down to a thousand curious causes.

And Mary, after all, possessed all the attributes that make a lamb above all other creatures want a fold and a shepherd. Although having all that life could give her, her whole life lay still before her. And being singularly ignorant of geography, directly she set out wandering she would inevitably lose her way.

So Miss Caldecott was not so far wrong after all and a great addition to the tea parties.

The motley crowd liked her. She brought luck to the tea, and—they couldn't explain the rest! But a heart of gold will find its way at last into the veriest heart of stone, and hearts at eighteen have not yet had time to ossify.

At any rate the little Moth had the joy of knowing that she was welcome, and she had no doubt at all but that she was useful.

She wanted some compensation—to be sure. The atmosphere, thick with tobacco of mixed quality made her most deadly sick, and deprived her of her night's rest for a full month. She endured it, however, as she would have endured the fires of Smithfield, and thought as little of her heroism as did those who were turned to cinders in that astonishing locality for the sake of a point of view, and for the making of men.

CHAPTER X

MARY'S letters to her husband were regular and very well expressed. She told Oliver all about his son, quite enough about the Lectures on Psychology, but very little of her experiments in it. They were so very perfunctory, almost as perfunctory as the boys, and it is difficult to a well-trained mind to put perfunctory things into elegant English when writing to a comparative stranger.

Oliver laughed after he had finished each letter, then he took violent exercise, or just worked harder. And now on the days of the mail's arrival he had sometimes to remind himself that he was a man after all, and not a machine, and it seemed to him that it was early days to start this sort of thing, while to be obliged to be always pulling yourself together was nearly as bad.

There was always Mrs. Quayle of course. She had drifted into the Station by some happy chance, but why, it puzzled him to guess.

Her husband had no need of paying jobs ; he could choose his climate.

"Perhaps it's because he likes you," Mrs. Quayle said in her passive way, "and he didn't hit it off with the men in the other Station."

Not an unusual circumstance where Quayle was concerned, Oliver reflected, but he had never known him leave a good Station for a bad before. Quayle stayed as a rule where he was comfortable, and where he could make fellows he had an edge on uncomfortable.

It's an ill wind, however, that blows nobody good, and Mrs. Quayle was a boon in a mild way. Oliver was sorry

the beastly place made her look rather plain. It wasn't playing the game on Quayle's part when he could afford to live anywhere. He glanced at the kind-eyed little woman, and thought of Mary when even *she* had drooped a little. Her eyes less radiantly wide-awake than usual, her colour waiting under the clear pallor to come out again with the evening breeze, her busy hands at rest, her active brain brooding. Mary a little under the weather had been more than usually dear and delightful.

One could only be sorry for poor little Mrs. Quayle. Oliver was sorry quite acutely at times. She really did look very unattractive.

She had no one to look after her—and since she was only Mrs. Quayle, no one in his senses could talk, so Oliver manifested his sympathy in deeds. He put himself out to a quite considerable extent to serve the poor little thing.

Being safe as a church is sometimes an asset to a woman, he thought once, as he was waiting for her rather longer than usual. One of her little commonplace virtues was never to keep him waiting. But to-day she could hardly endure her dull pallor, her dull eyes, her sad, tired mouth. She had things to make her pretty like other women. More than once her husband's sneers had driven her to them, but never yet had she used them to make herself presentable to Captain Mirrilies. She loathed them at the best of times,—and to please *his* eyes!—

She shuddered away from her reflection in the glass, but she resisted the temptation, as she had done many another, and came out looking a little plainer and more negative for her silent struggle. The processes of Mrs. Quayle went on too deeply and secretly ever to let out any of their beauty.

It was just the same with the higher emotions as with hats where Mrs. Quayle was concerned. Nothing ever seemed to suit her.

And yet some women will look all the better for the full practice of the seven deadly sins! It was very hard.

Mrs. Quayle had enough spirit, however, to be slightly amused at her own thankfulness in having kept so

rigorously on the safe side, as she now sat and discussed the moonlight picnic Captain Mirrilies had come to arrange about. Little as she guessed it he was going entirely on her account, for unless he did, the poor little thing would be left sitting alone under a deodar tree for three solid hours that night, and for some altogether vague and remote reason he felt himself to be in her debt. He owed her,—he wondered how much he really did owe her!—It was difficult to define anything in regard to Mrs. Quayle; she was so very indefinite, but she filled vacant places, that is all one could say. And with Mary attending Psychological Lectures with apparently no soul in them,—so much, at least, her compositions had let him see,—at the other side of the world, vacant places must be filled—with innocuous material for choice.

He was sorry when this thought shot out its ugly lip. He did owe her—but what the devil *did* he owe her?

Five minutes later, when he had dropped the picnic and gone on to Mary, Mrs. Quayle could have told him. She was giving him, with a white expressionless face, the thousand things for which Mary stood. The myriad invisible essences which weld together the substance necessary in the structure of a man, the things without which some men make no growth at all. She was giving of the best of herself to make Oliver. She was giving with her very best, the little negligible things that Mary had withheld until Oliver was worthy of them; for having suffered all things, Mrs. Quayle had learnt a few, and so had got a little ahead of Oliver's many-gifted wife.

But even the chequered stream of silver light in which she sat some hours later couldn't idealize Mrs. Quayle. She was depressed and depressing. She was forcing Oliver to stifle many a yawn, and to long with a great desire first for Mary, afterwards,—afterwards he would have been glad of any antidote! But he sat on patiently. If he left her—she would stay left. So Oliver, although dog-tired after a hard day, shook off his languor and fell to cheering up the poor little woman, and he was still so much of a boy at heart that his assumed gaiety turned so real in the end

that it got into the air, and at last it got even into Mrs. Quayle. In half an hour she forgot herself so much as even to forget her mission, and was another woman altogether. For the second time in their acquaintance, she surprised Oliver. She surprised other people as well. Her laugh,—the most attractive thing about Mrs. Quayle, rippled down the hill and transfixes the Station. Within the memory of man such sounds had never before issued from the closed lips of Mrs. Quayle.

The Usual Thing in the very crisis of an affair of her own, paused to listen. "I never did!" she gasped. "Is it dead bones coming to life? or a swan-song, or what? Is Captain Mirrilies to give us a sensation at last? Goodness knows we've waited long enough for either of them to oblige us with one. Heavens! Listen to that! Now that's what comes of a man keeping his eyes nailed to the Higher Education too long. Anything in the shape of a woman can make a fool of him."

Major Carlton laughed carelessly, as another laugh came rippling down. It was startling enough from Mrs. Quayle, and it reminded him that he had been sorry himself in his time for the poor little woman pretty as paint when she first came out, growing plainer every day under their very noses. To begin anyway by being pretty was always to her credit. If she hadn't he would not have troubled even to pause to think her out. To have any feeling at all for an ingrained ugly woman without the wit to conceal it was altogether beyond the limits of Major Carlton's creed. He liked Mirrilies and his wife, moreover, and knew Quayle better than anyone else did, so his face was graver than she liked to see it as it looked down on his companion, who couldn't have been much prettier had her own capable hands been in at her making.

"Look here," he said. "Don't start that sort of thing with them. Quite enough suitable material at hand."

"Where?" she demanded, wrinkling up her ridiculous little nose.

"It's always near enough, God knows."

"The climate's as good as any flaming angel to keep sin

off the premises. *I've* only alighted for a minute or two to preen my wings."

"Well, stick to your job, then, and don't sharpen your wits or other people's on those three, Kitty. Quayle is enough for any poor woman without women's tongues into the bargain, and I like both the Mirrilies'. I'll be glad if you let them alone, and I thought we were engaged on our own affairs. Hadn't we better return to our muttons, and let the poor little woman have her night out in peace, and give Mirrilies credit for more philanthropy than most of us are capable of?"

"What queer people seem to call out the nobler virtues in man. Catch any of you philanthropising over me!"

"But do you think you'd like it?"

"Depends on the philanthropist. Oh, come back out of this glare," she said, "and talk sense."

"Euphemistic way of saying our own affairs."

"Oh well, come on, and we'll talk about things we understand."

"Or don't."

"Speak for yourself, my good man," said she, as they melted away into the soft rolling waves of darkness crested with glancing points of light.

Meanwhile in the curious excitement of her unprecedented mood, Mrs. Quayle was saying the things her gentle heart felt with a subtle mist of flattery in them which she would not have dreamed of saying in her normal state. Under the silver silence of the moon's rays, in the soft warm hush the desire to be as happy as other women, to show herself at her best as they did, to forget the vileness of life in its ineffable joys, was getting the better of all her resolutions. Her trampled heart and soul and spirit lifted themselves from their degradation panting with eagerness to prove themselves, to do something, effect something after their long, long years of crouching in the dust.

It was a startlingly stimulating experience to Mrs. Quayle to find that she could even now be what she had never been, an attractive woman. To dare to show a side of her that she had kept secret all these years, to dare

to assert her all round womanhood was amazingly refreshing.

She had given good gifts to Oliver Mirrilies, greater and more inestimable than he knew. In her quiet commonplace way she had inspired him, and kept him going. She had always known this, and rejoiced in the knowledge, but never before had she dominated him, or anyone else. And now to be able to do this, and to do it triumphantly, and what is more to be able to go on doing it,—she knew she could!—was entralling. Some source within her had opened, and it was for her to draw treasure from it,—or to seal it tight and go on as usual.

For a second she paused, wavering, and in the pause she grew cold in the mellow warmth.—To go on as usual, alone along the dull monotonous high-road of daily life, everything worth having in you down-trodden in the dust, to go on dull-eyed, dull-cheeked—with a tired mouth,—to pass on alone, leaving everything but a little pity behind you. It seemed inconceivable in the radiant glow of her whole being. To seal up your Treasure-cave just as you had discovered it, and to pass on, would only be to leave yourself, and the world, poorer than either you or the world could ever know, she thought crazily.

Oh! she couldn't, she couldn't, not just yet.—To catch hold of everything she had ever wanted just to let it go, and for what? She couldn't.—No one could.

Captain Mirrilies was smoking and waiting for more. He was having an unexpectedly agreeable evening, and he was glad of it. Sitting with Mrs. Quayle in the moonlight wasn't as a rule what a man would exactly hanker after. But to-night,—why to-night was a bit of a startler. After so many uneventful years of the little woman he could never have suspected her of this,—and neither he felt sure could Mary, who had had even more of her.

Good—she was as good as gold, of course!—but to be amusing you and bucking you up!

Oliver had always done his best not to let himself get too bored with her.—He had to thank her for a lot—but there was no talk of being bored to-night. Instead of being bored

he was getting things from Mrs. Quayle that goodness solid as a wall could never give a man.

He had plenty of experience. As a rising man he had taken all the virtue of India in to dinner, and had often found it very hard labour, and indeed Mrs. Quayle herself had not always been a feather-weight, but to-night he could relax, and let her take the field. It was exhilarating to find a woman, who had so often made you yawn now making you laugh, and whether it was the moonlight or a new dress she seemed to have dropped half a dozen hot weathers. She was almost the girl they had known, Mary and he, when she had first come out.

He stretched unobtrusively but luxuriously. It was good to loaf, and let someone else do the work.

Captain Mirrilies settled himself so that he could look at her. He laughed under his breath. He had so often wanted to look the other way. Nothing he disliked more than seeing a woman going to pieces under your very eyes. Being of the same make as the fellow who was causing the devastations, you somehow felt yourself responsible, in a way, for his balked job.

But even in the midst of her first triumph, her miserable little conscience, feminine to a degree, couldn't let Mrs. Quayle alone.

And yet it was her one little moment, just one in a long, long life, and she must make the best of it. It couldn't last. It might never return. She got pale at the very thought, and at the same time tried to feel that perhaps it were better so,—but she couldn't feel it, so she pushed past her conscience, and said gaily and rather at random :

" Do you know that yesterday at Mrs. Cameron's tea, Mrs. Hanworth said that neither you nor Mary deserved the least credit for being examples,—that was her word, not mine,—that you're both much too highly specialized for any up-to-date temptation."

Even before she had finished she hesitated and was sorry. It was so unlike their usual conversations, it was too personal, it might lead to,—to—anything. At the same time she was glad it was said ; the impulse to be intimate

for the first time in her life, to break through the chill of acquaintanceship into the warm zone of friendship was overpowering—and only one little minute, perhaps in the long, long years ! But she had grown so shy of the reality of people and things,—the only reality she knew was so horrible,—that she blushed crimson. Oliver only laughed, however.

“ Go on,” he said ; “ explain her theory.”

“ She said that you’ve both never dealt with instincts as they deserved, but soared right off to the higher plane, hardly pausing on the emotional at all, and are now enclosed in mail coats of intellect impervious to all attacks of the lower nature. That no dart forged by world, flesh or devil could pierce such armour as yours.”

“ Ha ! That’s interesting, and Mrs. Hanworth interests you ? ”

“ She does, curiously. And you and Mary interest her, but this is gossip, isn’t it, and you’ve always been above gossip.”

“ Who ever said that I was above gossip ? ” said Oliver. “ Go on. Mrs. Hanworth has introduced a new note into the tea-parties, hasn’t she ? ”

It seemed to be all part and parcel of the night to Captain Mirrilies, and over-specialization was a good word for Mary. He wondered how far it would carry her, and why it had failed him. And one could say a lot to Mrs. Quayle without prejudice.

“ Yes, I’ve been thinking about it a good deal. That sort of woman—it’s no use pretending not to know about her,—” she said quickly, “ I’ve always pretended until now, but to-night I can’t. She brought a new note into the dull little gossip, she made it bigger and more important. I think she rounded it out, made it sort of weld into life,—a necessary part of it, not the wretched snippets and shavings and dust of life that it generally is, only fit for the fire or the rubbish heap. I think we all went home *thinking* in our several little ways,—not as we generally do, to forget as fast as we can to make room for the next cargo. Mrs. Hanworth’s done more evil

than any one of us, and she has twice the sense of the lot of us put together, and a bigger outlook, and gossip is horribly mean, *really*, and I've got miles away from Mary and you."

"We'll keep, we're eminently solid people, while Mrs. Hanworth's influence must necessarily be as evanescent as it is entralling. She's here, I have no doubt, on private and evanescent affairs."

"Major Carlton, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so, but one may as well give a touch of subtlety to brutal factors on such a night. At any rate she's very quick in her methods, she won't be shedding her enlarging influence for very long on your tea-parties. She has other fish to fry."

"She'll fry them beautifully," said Mrs. Quayle pensively.

"She will.—I don't say you others haven't chosen the better part. God knows you have, and every man-jack of us,—no matter what part he's chosen himself, would be ready, at any hour of the day or night, to stand up and call you blessed. You've done incredible wonders for us and the world, only being selfish brutes with no natural inclination towards the practice or extortion of self-sacrifice, we're sometimes rather afraid of your over-doing it. It's a big job, you see, to keep the world even decently clean, so that it's been a sort of perpetual spring-cleaning with the women who've undertaken it,—the faithful women who have kept the flag flying since the first of them left Eden. She's swept out all her own corners, just as she'd like to sweep out all the corners of the Universe. But she's sometimes left herself a bit bleak and bare, as she'd leave the Universe if she had an absolutely free hand. She's swept out things," said Oliver half to himself, "some of us think she'd better have stuck to. She's put many a thing that's offended her perhaps because she's failed to understand it, on the dust heap, and she wants all her gold fresh from the refining-pot, never taking into consideration the fact that the alloy is as necessary as the gold to hold things together.

I say—the moonlight has got to my head," said Oliver, laughing and blinking. "I'm thinking aloud, just as it comes—most of it nonsense. Mrs. Hanworth's influence I dare say. Why don't you shut me up?"

"Because I want to listen to you. I understand you, —to-night, and that's Mrs. Hanworth's influence too. But why has she it? How does it come? Why are we blind and over-scrubbed? and smelling horribly of yellow soap?"

"Good Lord! Don't!"

"Don't! It's been 'don't' from the beginning of the world, a purely negative process. I want something positive like—like Mrs. Hanworth.—She and you have the monopoly of the *does*, and we of the *don'ts*, and it's unfair to both of us I think."

Oliver gasped in the silence of his soul and waited. She had better get it said and done with, however, lest worse befall.

"Go on," he said, lighting a cigarette.

"Our don't doesn't seem to have been an all-round nourishing diet," she said, looking out into the shining mystery of the Indian night. "Even women started with free will. We must have had a lot to do with our own making from the very first, and it's been a very one-sided making,—we've been doing right in the wrong way all the time, and now the passion for spring-cleaning so long in our blood seems to have made us remorseless in our methods to ourselves, as remorseless to ourselves, as we are to you. And I don't think you're any more successful than we are. I wonder if we'd shared the toil, worked out the details of our growth together, if we'd all be any happier," she said with her odd low laugh. "But you see the very minute the woman took her broom the man went hunting, and so our methods of growing have always been kept secret the one from the other, and there has always been a slight antagonism between the two. The man's work was his pleasure, and the woman's her duty, and he had sun and air on it and a blue sky above, while she had dust and soapsuds and a low roof."

"Heavens above! What's put all this into your head?"

"I don't know. Mrs. Hanworth perhaps. She's thrown her broom over the garden wall long ago and gone hunting,—or poaching,—or pirating,—and I'd be sitting alone to-night except for you being sorry for me, and I'm a good woman who has stuck to her broom, and Mrs. Hanworth, who hasn't, has never had to sit alone in all her born days."

"I'm sitting with you because I like doing so."

"Yes—to-night—because I'm not as good as usual. It's Mrs. Hanworth's influence on both of us."

Oliver felt rather embarrassed, and yet this was not the sort of thing that a woman as reticent as Mrs. Quayle should be bottling up. He was immensely sorry for her. She must have suffered more acutely than one could have supposed from her passive attitude of acceptance; possibly she knew more of the Major than anyone supposed, and in any case women were beyond him.

"Women who go hunting, or poaching, or pirating," he said quietly, "often go in very good company, and if they don't leave their consciences at home they revise them before the start, and are ready for anything, and being adventuresses they have no fear of facts, naturally, or of anything else, and being always on the make they must always be on the alert, strung up to victory, you know. They can't afford to be dull."

"No, they're positive like men, not passive like the broom woman. They've taken their fate into their own hands, and though virtue is never its own reward, I think courage sometimes is. The woman who has the courage begins to question the 'don'ts' of the ages early. —She's not afraid to go into them as we are. Familiarity breeds contempt in the end, and presently she laughs at them. Then it's all a great big joke with limitless possibilities."

"Mrs. Hanworth is charming, but so are you in your way, and it's the better way, believe me. It's Mary's way," he said, with great gentleness.

"It's Mary's way, yes," she said slowly. "It's Mary's way, but Mary *is* charming, she can't help it. She *is*. And I've never charmed anyone in my life."

She stood up and leant against the tree, silent.

There was a long pause,—and in the pause had Oliver looked,—he was too busy thinking of Mary to look,—he would have seen a struggle and a victory, and then a great whiteness, not the shining whiteness of the moon's light, but the dead whiteness of infinite pain falling upon her face, then another pause for recovery of her passivity.

When Oliver did look up she looked just tired again, and he was sorry. She had been rather fine that unexpectedly pleasant evening.

"It's a matter of courage and encouragement," she laughed at his puzzled face. "I'm speaking of charm," she said. "It's the flowers in the meadow, the flower border in the kitchen garden at the feet of the espaliered pears, and if anyone ever lets her broom or her conscience or expediency,—the bugbears of women,—rob the meadow or the vegetable garden of their due, she deserves all she gets."

Her face was shining again, no longer cold and dead. Oliver stood up, still slightly puzzled.

"No woman wants more than just to be herself," he said kindly.

"Yes, that's just all," she said. She was laughing, but she looked very grave, and sweet, and rather young again. "But one must see to the flowers when the meadow and the garden are both young, you know. Later on, one can never make the flowers look quite natural and at home, but still one can always grow good cabbages."

"Cabbages," said Major Quayle. "You seemed too merry for cabbages as I came up. I've been looking for you this half-hour."

"Surely not," said Oliver, looking at his watch, "By Jove! yes. Well, cabbages seem to have shortened the time," he said, laughing. "Good night, Mrs. Quayle, your husband will rob me of the pleasure of driving you home."

Quayle looked more than the usual rotter, he thought, as he went down the hill. "He looked deep, and she's got to the bottom of him. The dregs at the ultimate depths of Quayle would be pretty thick I fancy for an inexperienced woman. The sort of wisdom that poor little woman is out for isn't for the likes of her, I fancy," he thought presently, "it will only fill her with a few more unfulfilled wants. I wonder what drove her to it, I wish to God something would drive Mary in the same direction.—Nature to choose that poor little thing and to pass my magnificent Mary by!"

CHAPTER XI

MRS. QUAYLE had now for many years apprehended, with unerring precision, the myriad glances of her husband, and followed furtively with all the cunning of frightened creatures all his moods. She thought she knew him. But to-night there was something in both glance and mood that baffled and alarmed her. She had believed until now that she knew the worst of Frank, but now there seemed to be a deeper worst beyond the reach of her plumbing line, and if it was too deep for that, it must be deep indeed!

Like all supercilious people, Major Quayle had many other contemptible qualities. If he despised a woman, he let her see it, and see at the same time the worst of himself. He had never scrupled to shock the sense of decency of any creature of as little account as his wife. He hadn't troubled very much to deceive her. He had simply disregarded her, and gone his way. The instant she first betrayed her fear of him and of herself, and had begun to fade, having failed to provide him with a healthy heir,—he thanked his stars that he had the luck at least to be tied to a fool, and proceeded to take full advantage of his good fortune.

The world, after all, can stand a lot, and so far he had never got caught. And even facts—he flattered himself he could hide any fact beyond Barbara's finding, for to be sure it never does to let a fool get hold of a fact.

It was himself he took no trouble to hide, and it was through him that Barbara ultimately arrived at the facts. Since he was what he was, the facts were inevitable. The

shock of a man is another thing altogether from the shock of a fact. The man is eternal. The fact a little thing of time.

When Barbara became intelligently aware of the facts, she had already settled down to patience. It would have been despair but for one latent hope. Some day even now the child for which she lived might still be hers, hers altogether. This was the one fierce resolve of her life.

The child, the ultimate one that should live at last should be all hers. By sheer force of the bidding of her whole being she would shut out Frank Quayle altogether in this affair of her own child. Diffident in regard to all her other powers, of her miraculous ability to exclude Major Quayle from any part or lot in his child she was absolutely sure. It had become a fixed principle in her. The meanest must have something, she would wrest this one concession from fate.

Frank might have his heir, but she would have her child. When her one or two lukewarm friends wondered why Mrs. Quayle didn't divorce her husband,—she probably could,—Barbara who knew without any probability that she would have no difficulty whatever, did not do so. She was shy by nature, too shy and retiring for the glare of the Divorce Court, and all her traditions were against it, but it was not that which kept her a passive slave, it was her fear of herself that was robbing her of her freedom.

To stay on and suffer was her one available chance. If she divorced Frank there was the end of everything, for she felt with the dull certainty of doom that no other man would ever want her. The child of her burning desire could never be hers. And to-night, this night of wonders, the whole world had changed, for she had at last dared to claim her right in it. She need no longer be a childless slave waiting for the chance that never came. She was only twenty-seven after all, and she could easily be pretty again—if—

She paused and started. Major Quayle was speaking,

saying something in the mellow drawl he used to other women but never now to her. It was the oddest, most grotesque echo of the honeymoon. She looked up at him curiously. He was suave and aware—pleasantly bent on recognizing her existence. There was something so sinister in the attitude that nervous dread nearly drove her into crackling laughter.

In readjusting all her values Frank's had risen in a horrible way. He had held the one hope of her life in his cruel unclean hands for so long, that to escape in any hurry from the self-imposed thrall was impossible. Barbara could only recover herself enough to look limp and pale, and just as usual.

Major Quayle's lips began to form themselves to their accustomed sneer but he checked the inclination and let them smile.

To have to control your mind and manners in the presence of your wife, the natural order that long habit had corrupted was hard labour of a peculiarly obnoxious kind to the man, but when his immediate interests were involved Major Quayle never shirked a job. He was now smiling quite naturally and agreeably. Barbara, limp as she looked, remembered acutely how once she used to wait breathless for that smile, and put down its increasing rarity to some new deficiency of her own, and how she had walked delicately in fear and trembling lest she should repeat the offence.

Sometimes in her first bleak agony she had tried to *pray* back the receding smile. Now she racked her awakening intelligence to discover what it portended, and to frustrate its undoubtedly evil import. But even as her intellect groped about after light, her heart, more adult and virile, cried out against this necessity imposed upon her, the necessity of a slave to propitiate or coerce her master.

Half an hour ago she had been free and fine, she could give even more than she would take, she could have given anything for a sufficient motive. She had been a reasonable self-respecting creature, fit help-meet for any man

with decent instincts ; now she was a worm wriggling its way through life at the mercy of a reckless heel, and Frank was smiling down on her and saying something about the moon !

Barbara had put herself into the background to such an extent that practically she had lost touch with herself. She had hardly known what her suppressed, hushed-up self was made of until this fateful night of revelation. A self had come out into the moonlight that night that demanded recognition.

Conventionally it was a self to be rather ashamed of, and yet instead of being ashamed, she gloried in it. She did love Oliver Mirrilies, Mary's husband. This was a sin, and yet there was no sin in love. The only sin in the whole wide world was want of love.

In spite of all her weary efforts Mrs. Quayle had never felt quite good until to-night. She had been standing on tip-toes all her life it seemed to her, to reach goodness, and dropping to the ground again with empty hands. But to-night she had touched it, and her hands were full. She was no longer straining after the impossible. Directly she knew absolutely what love was, and knew herself to be part of it, she knew herself to be part of goodness also.

For one wild instant she wondered if she'd just be the self that had sprung into life like the moth of a night, and astonish Frank to the day of his death. She could do more,—she could interest and attract, she could even abash him. Perhaps she might win him back, but the time for that was past ; he had trampled out her love with her life and her hopes. He had given her the ultimate shock from which there is no recovery for women, so she drew the mask of passivity over her nascent face, and in a brooding voice admitted the moon to be altogether admirable.

Barbara had looked so ripping, so startling even up there on the hill, that Major Quayle's well-practised faculty of jealousy rose all of a sudden to the surface. It was really rather an exhilarating sensation to be still capable of jealousy in regard to the poor old wisp. It made him

feel quite young and fit. More especially since his own affairs were just then full of promise. It showed certainly some breadth of mind and heart to let poor old Barbara have a look in at all in the circumstances.

Again he glanced at her. Barbara's late and very definite deviation from herself came in most opportunely, it was indeed almost like a special interposition of Providence distinctly favourable to his own affairs, and yet he felt both jealous and annoyed as he paused to formulate his course.

"Whatever she undertakes she's sure to spoil in the end," he thought with mixed emotions; "she didn't make a bad start," he spurred his halting jealousy back to the honeymoon, "but good God, she soon dropped back to herself, and just now over there was an echo of the first start. And if Mirrilies is fool enough, if habit or the damned climate, or too much frozen intellect and that at the ends of the earth get the better of him, she'll bore him in a month. I'll be sorry for both of them. I shall, by Jove!"—He paused to sigh.—"But it's the only way out of it, after all."

He glanced in spirit back at the hill dressed in silver light, and returned to business, whether from recent tender memories or the moonlight slightly sicklied over with virtue. He'd give the little fool a chance, and if she didn't take it, well then, no matter what happened, he wouldn't have her on his conscience.

Major Quayle was at this period plainly in a melting mood.

If certain projects for the future went well,—certain remote, half-formulated intentions of turning over a new leaf now vaguely troubled his mind. It was love he supposed and all that sort of thing; the genuine article this time.—It might have been Barbara's all right, he thought, with another glance if—well—if she hadn't been Barbara. And to be bucking up like that over on the hill—why she didn't look twenty!—for the sake of a prig like Mirrilies,—it was incredible!—Had the woman no taste—no—er—anything?

Major Quayle squared his fine shoulders, and prepared to speak his word of warning, and at the same time possibly gain some useful information. Fortunately with a fool like Barbara, it was not necessary to use much finesse,—had quite enough of that sort of thing to keep on tap for use in other quarters—it was a wearing time taking it all round—and looking at Barbara didn't mend matters much—anyway.

If Mirrilies did make a fool of himself, he'd have to pay up well for his sins, serve him right, the damned prig, and that wife of his going round the Station pretending to see nothing, and dissecting you all the time with her confounded scalpel of an intellect. No one was safe. The sooner she was out of India for good the better.

In his agitation Major Quayle spoke with less studied moderation than he had intended.

" You don't happen to know, do you, how long Mirrilies is going to be a grass-widower ? "

" I didn't know that Mary was coming out at all this time."

" Two and a half years ! Good thing it's Mirrilies."

" It is," she said passively.

" He is the saint he pretends to be, I suppose ? "

" Does he pretend to be a saint ? I thought he was only very fond of Mary."

" Fool ! " reflected the Major, " or as deep as the pit ! "

Her face on the hill wouldn't leave him alone. It was damned impudent of such a face. And that laugh—and good God ! perhaps not the first time either. It was convenient, he must admit, precisely what he was playing for—but—Major Quayle pursed his full lips. He flicked up the pony sharply, and rather wished it was Barbara. Sort of woman you could never have a moment's peace with—if it wasn't one thing it was another. He flicked again, and the pony made a bolt while Barbara clung limply to her seat.

" The usual thing—not the spirit of a dormouse, and to be peacocking up there as bold as brass. And laughing

by Jove!—Barbara laughing! Had the woman no decency at all?—Was she like all the other prudes?

At the same time business is business.

“Barbara,” he said, forcing himself into civility of speech, “I suppose you write to Mrs. Mirrilies?”

“Oh! Once a year or so.”

“I thought it was heart-to-heart with you in that quarter.”

“I don’t think I have a heart-to-heart correspondence with anybody,” she said patiently, trying to track his train of thought. He thought of her on the hill, and whistled with a suggestion of insolence.

Barbara sat on stonily, and suddenly her heart sprang to the truth. He had puzzled her as he had not done for years; but now she knew. At last the thing she had known might come was upon her. She was about,—not at once, but when the time was fully ripe,—to receive her notice to quit.

After all her patience he was about to turn the tables on her if he could. Instead of permitting her to dismiss him, he was going to make a well-laid effort to dismiss her, and Captain Mirrilies was to be the scapegoat.

She saw it all, he meant all this, and at the same time he was all the time bitterly, coldly, impatiently, resenting her own one little moment of living,—the moment he had surprised, the one and only circumstance that could ever have justified him in his vile hope, that could have made it even credible at all.

It was so strange and sinister, so exactly like Frank.

She grew slowly cold.

The one secret unspoken hope that when she went she would not go alone, but with her heart’s desire in her arms was fading out at last. She knew Frank,—anything he meant to do,—he would do. And to burn your own boats honestly and without shame is one thing, but to have them burnt for you, and to be cast adrift without one hope is altogether another.

And that a man she had once loved dearly, and to whom she could have given so much, to want to turn her

out without one hope and all the shame into any wilderness ! because her last use was gone !

He had found someone at last who, all the conditions fulfilled, and the conventionalities satisfied, was willing to provide him with a lawful heir—and she must make way for her.

It was hard,—hard and just in the very hour when a woman had found herself, when that which she had thought dead was alive again. And to hate her with a hate more bitter than usual because she had suddenly come to her power of helping him in his nefarious project, because he had seen her at last a potential factor in her own ruin, not merely a passive implement in his cunning hands.

She had always recoiled from the subtle contradictions in Frank's nature. Now she seemed almost to stifle in their poisonous vapour.

She shivered as it were under her breath,—for now another danger seemed suddenly to confront her, a new one, of which she knew very little.—Even if Frank should cast her out,—he can do anything, anything, she thought wildly!—with nothing to care for, nothing to gather in her senses about, the life that was born that night would live, and would keep on living and growing,—it would grow,—grow like a bean stalk,—it would stretch out for what it wanted and take it.

She sat still controlling feeling and thought. And slowly as it had gripped them, the coldness released her trembling senses, and they seemed to expand and stretch themselves anew, and in a sudden warm glow, she saw the man who had despised her for seven long years recognizing the fact that she was a woman after all with the infinite power of a woman in her hands. And if after everything she could convince Frank, she must be a woman indeed !

“ India,” said Major Quayle, “ is the land of the unexpected. The one place on earth where cock-sureness never pays. Even a prig may remember once too often that he is a man. If I were you I’d write a veiled state-

ment of this fact to Mrs. Mirrilies. Three years' grass-widowhood is a bit too much of a discipline for man or prig."

"The Station is very limited," said Mrs. Quayle calmly, but again as white as her handkerchief.

What possessed her anyway with all these quick changes. She was plainly bent on irritating and annoying him at every turn,—and putting himself out as he was to serve the little fool!

"Oh, well, she's your affair, not mine," he said, "I thought she—at least they were your only real friends——"

"I say, be careful," he said wrathful, though righteous still. "You ought to know that step by this time surely."

CHAPTER XII

MARY'S intellect now worked furiously, and it never even struck her to spare it. It was a willing beast in a sound body, and wanted regular exercise to bring out its powers. For this she was thankful. A difficult subject swaddled in German calls out all one's resources, and she had not come all that way to be beaten. She was fascinated moreover by her subject. It sparkled and scintillated with brilliant light, and there was no more warmth in it than in a star or a diamond.

She herself too seemed to be growing cold in the queerest way, and often now even Oliver the Less couldn't warm her. In spite of her revulsions and revolts, some curious great longing for the fires of life seemed to be taking root in her.

Since Oliver had found his "chillen," his mother often felt like a deserted nest. It was ridiculous of course. She was only too glad that Oliver should have his heart's desire, should play and be developed, and made a man of. Mary glowed with pride in him, but they had been closer together when they had stood outside unfriendly gates hankering after the children the gates shut in.

They had been each other's only consolation then. Having Oliver also in his little way an outcast always so close to her, had kept her warm perhaps.

* * * * *

Mrs. Mirrilles was not grumbling. She was only trying to account rationally for her growing coldness. She even tried to pretend to herself that it was the general unfriendliness in everything that chilled her. It might even be

the churlish stoves that shut out the glory of flame from an entire nation, just as the gates had shut out the glory of Oliver from its children.

The boys indeed were a perennial joy, but they didn't take the cold away. Very often they increased it. Their naïve revealings sometimes brought little chills creeping down her back for Oliver the Greater, of all people in the world. He also had been a boy, and if the boy is father to the man, then Oliver,—even in the heart of India, might perhaps be having cold fits too!

Mary had counted so much on the satisfying effect of work on a man's intellect, but the boys were clever enough and work didn't satisfy them. Far from it. Work indeed filled their days most profitably, Mary permitted no slackers in her circle; but when the work was done, they put it up on the shelf with their drawing-boards and returned to the things that mattered. Games mattered a good deal to the English boys, and "Corps" to the others, but what mattered most to all of them was something feminine,—reputable or disreputable,—something expressed or implied, and it ran, a principle rather than a person, through all their youth. But principle or person it seemed to keep out the cold. It was plainly the fire of the world of youth. The sacred fire of the hearth that warms and cleanses, or the wanderer and the vagabond that burns and destroys.

Mary liked the thing expressed best, when implied it frightened her. It got itself so mixed up with other terrifying implied things, and now, contrary to all former usage, she would lure out into speech what once she had lured back into silence, and watch cold and apprehensive, the stupendous and plumbless power of this strange world force.

The strenuous exercise and training to which Mrs. Mirrilles was subjecting her very adult intellect, may have acted as a slight stimulus upon her very young soul, for there was given to her a very pleasant way of breaking a silence,—rather of permitting it to be broken,—to which convention has accorded a certain sort of sanctity. A

stupendous fact in life, a fact apparently engaging the real attention of half the world,—and without any doubt at all filling every heart except her own and the little Moth's at all her tea-parties, becomes difficult to ignore.

They were nice boys. Oliver must have been like them in a way. If it filled their hearts, perhaps it had filled his. Perhaps it filled it still. If it did, it was her business also. What was good enough for Oliver was good enough for her—but this she admitted with a wry mouth, sometimes even when it struck her too sharply, she covered her face in her bed-clothes and cried. And yet she must know—she must understand at any cost.

So simply, straightforwardly, thinking only of her two Olivers, Mary forgot herself, and listened with an open mind, and very rarely she spoke.

She was like a diamond or a star herself to the boys. A lifter of hearts, a cooler of fires, and as such, with an interlude or two, they would worship her to the day of their deaths.

They did say a good deal. Years afterwards they will remember that they said more than they suppressed. Speaking to stars one can say so much they can't possibly understand.

They were right in some degree in this surmise. Mary's investigations were purely empirical. She was still transmuting earth into a substance fit neither for Heaven or earth, as they would later know. But she understood many things in her own way, and all those things of which the boys spoke in parables,—they said everything in the right way, and for this she was very grateful to them,—must have been all the time lying silent in Oliver, forced into silence by her own great unspoken fear.

So the boys stood for a warm earth, she for a cold Heaven. She for reason; they for revolt, and in neither was the young vision keen enough to discern that the two are eternally one, indivisible; that the star and the fire are one in the same purpose, except when man with his free will goes meddling. That the star tempers the fire, and the fire takes the chill from the star, and that the eternal

victory lies in the hands of Beauty which is both star and fire.

It was a young Russian Count with English proclivities studying Philosophy in the University, who brought the first hitch into the tea-parties. Lasotovitsch was a well-washed, well-groomed specimen of the great Slav group.

Mary herself had brought him in. She had marked him from the first. He showed race in every line, and reeked of Temperament. Dangerous possibly but undoubtedly an object-lesson for the boys, with his face like that of an experienced angel.

Besides, Mrs. Mirrilies had to be reforming even if it were now under her breath,—and she had perceived valuable possibilities in Lasotovitsch.

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The face of Lasotovitsch was one that any young Englishman in his senses must distrust on sight. The face—and the soul of which it is the expression.

To pray God to be with him when he goes briganding, or after his neighbour's wife, and honestly to mean it, is altogether beyond the conception of our nation of hypocrites, all too used to artificial bridges with virtue going delicately up one side and vice rocking gaily down the other, each eternally convicting the other.

So seeing the young lion preparing to lash its tail, Mrs. Mirrilies took a mean advantage, and identified Lasotovitsch with herself. The lion could then only grind his milk teeth.

It was a very mean advantage, seeing that Mrs. Mirrilies and her *protégé*—being engaged in the same pursuits, could score over the rest of them,—all on the engineering side,—worlds away from Philosophy.

It was the Englishmen who were most resentful. The others, not having had the advantage of being brought up in the Public Schools of a little Island, had been listening to everything for years, and sniffing airs impregnated with strange philosophies. They had also been taught something in their schools, and though they certainly didn't

want this Russian genius with his baffling insight into things in general, and a touch of anarchy up his sleeve, in their very midst, they had no fear of being put out of the running straight off by the strange allusions of an unknown species, as the English had. All nations indeed looked slightly askance at Mrs. Mirrilies, but Young England was already on its hind legs, glowering. Of this attitude, however, Mary would have none. She knew better than it did itself the masterful desire of her guard of honour to bowdlerize the latest foreign importation, but it struck her in her growing tolerance that if she wasn't now old enough to bowdlerize her own guests she never would be.

"Count Lasotovitsch speaks English," said Mary, "in the charming way of his people."

Lasotovitsch advanced with friendly eagerness. He had lost nothing of the glower but took it to be part of England, one more little idiosyncrasy. And what matters one, after all, among so many?

"I have long desired to know the English," said Lasotovitsch, with an acutely angelic face and the usual objectionable bow. "And indeed why should you learn the other languages when we must all learn yours?"—He was quite honestly glad to be able to pay so honest a compliment, but there was a look of damning appeal in his pellucid eyes.

"He might be a flapper on her first trial," thought Heron, one of the knot huddled together in the middle of the room.

At the first note of danger, Englishmen not yet cosmopolitan, will always flow together, and even after they become cosmopolitan, being always the centre of the Universe, they will naturally make for the centre of the room.

No matter what his private opinion may be, an Englishman, however, can generally rise to the occasion.

Hallowes, the most remarkable perhaps of the little group, rose first.

Lasotovitsch might be padded with bombs and vices, utterly unfit for ladies' society, and a nuisance generally, but he was the guest of Mrs. Mirrilies, and even if he's

slow about it, an English gentleman must act as such. So the gloom resolved itself into a smile, which, being slow and sure, and slightly touched by duty, seemed to Lasotovitsch most attractive, and entirely English, and just what he had expected. The glibber, less self-conscious smiles of the Italians and French struck him as almost common place in comparison. A nation that did very much the same as other nations, and can yet take itself seriously, was a stimulating novelty to this thoughtful young man, and it amused him.

Lasotovitsch could be immensely amused under his angelic exterior. If he had lived as the English boys did, in a free land, he could have laughed like Thor.

"Happy nation," thought Lasotovitsch, as he looked with a friendly eye at the fair, frank, charming group, "that needn't think until forced into it by life! We others have had thought imposed upon us from our cradles. It is doom, we cannot escape it. It is the sadness of the great steppes, and the great forests, and our innumerable people. It all makes us think too young and hampers our actions. We are oppressed by the greatness we have not yet learnt to handle."

The pupils of Lasotovitsch were expanding in the oddest way. Hallowes put it down to diffidence, and rather liked the fellow for it. He took him out on the verandah, and applied cigarettes. Mary was delighted. To take a foreigner out on the verandah almost on sight, was a wholesome sign.

From her own point of view Lasotovitsch was the precise thing she was out for. He let you see him thinking and how the thoughts came and why. He never seemed to learn at all. He just knew while she stumbled on in the wake of the others. Above all she felt sure, that presently she would *see* Lasotovitsch living, and the living process in any life,—one could always make allowances for racial differences,—must be the same.

Mrs. Mirrilies laughed as she made the tea, then blushed like a girl. She was at her old game again, the game she had resolved for the thousandth time to throw up.

Even in this Russian boy with the mystery of genius suspect in him, she must be tracking Oliver's point of view; trying, why she could not tell, to justify Oliver or was it herself she wanted to justify? Mary was honest with herself. She did not know.

She gave up the tea-making with joy directly Miss Caldecott appeared, and went out to the boys.

The boy like a bean-pole who had taken over Lasotovitsch had a face like an effete baby, and teeth like pearls. He did everything, good and bad, and did it well, and the spirit of change was in him. He had crowded his years which were twenty-one, with events, and his tastes were wide and varied. No sooner did he see anyone do anything well, than he proceeded to do it better, not for vain-glory but simply to prove himself, and having proved himself he passed on, his eyes on the next obstacle. He had a passion, extremely trying to his family, for trying experiments.

When about nine years of age he had begun to experiment in scholarships, and having convinced himself and everyone else that he would have no difficulty later on in paying his triumphant way through any University, he turned his back on an Academic career, and his attention on the Navy.

He passed first into the *Britannia*, and having narrowly escaped expulsion, passed out second, then smilingly proceeded to review the situation.

Once an Admiral, of course, nothing could be better. He thrilled with all the power essential to the Admiral who should one day hold the fate of England in his hands. He had no more doubt of himself than he had of England, but to be a unit hanging on to the end of a wireless system for a matter of perhaps forty years didn't somehow appeal to Hallowes, so he went off whistling to try the other Service. He astonished the examiners into giving him a first, and was rejected because of chest measurement. In any case as in the Navy job, the probation was too long, so, docile as ever, and always ready to oblige his distracted family, he paused to think of the Foreign Office. He knew as

surely as though he had already done it, that if anyone living could make Europe sit up, it would be himself, but the years that must inevitably lie between him and an Ambassadorship were too long. A gentleman jockey was a quicker thing, but having trained himself down to a raisin a day, his lanky frame rebelled, and he found himself constrained to go abroad for rest and recuperation. His parents, a severely academic and erudite pair, also long and lank, with the pale blood of the scholar flowing in stately measure through their veins, were immensely proud of their all-too-versatile son, and immensely apprehensive. They accompanied him on his travels. After some shy and spectacled investigations into the morality of the more southerly lands, they deposited him, at last, in the educational establishment of an old governess in a discreet city of Switzerland, to perfect himself in languages.

Hallowes chuckled with glee. The girls were charming, and the Assistant Mistresses did not fall far behind, and when he chose to exert himself, he could always look like a baby *before* it became effete. He rapidly acquired perfection in languages, as rapidly put on flesh, and practically very soon ran the school.

Eventually he had to leave somewhat hurriedly, and entered the University of Zürich, to show the wide world of Europe what he could do with Engineering.

Here, contrary to all precedent, he was gaily breaking every rule, and setting many a German Jew, in spite of his enlightened Atheism, hankering after the God of vengeance he had discarded, if only to pour His plagues upon this unaccountable infant.

It was only because of his colossal intelligence that he was kept in his Classes at all, so all the Professors said.

It was the unaccountableness of Hallowes to the German Jew mind that really saved him: not his colossal intelligence at all, for being colossally intelligent themselves, the Professors were anxious to account for this Anglo-Saxon freak who could do anything apparently but support himself, or settle down respectably into a *Fach*.

Genius they knew. They had suffered from it. But this wasn't Genius. Genius belongs to the world, and leaves treasure behind it. It justifies itself of Posterity.

This audacious and infantile creature who handled the weightiest subjects of Science, as lightly as he would his cricket bat, and *Gott Allmächtig*, played as skilful a game with them, belonged to England, and would leave nothing behind him but his debts.

In the interest of scientific investigation even a Teutonic Hebrew can wink the other eye. So Hallowes was kept on for purposes of observation.

"It is inconvenient," said the most colossally endowed intellect of his Professors. "It is even scarcely respectable to accept drawings with skilfully executed portraits of all you others on the margins—he leaves *me* out—but the drawings, they are superb, and as for the portraits he has the artist's eye, and—er—the devil's humour. It is not genius,—It has not the divine permanence of the Teutonic genius,—the sparkle of the French, the feeling of the Italian, the mystic power of the Slav. It is the English insolence which will beat each nation at its own game and then on—on—picking his way amongst the vanquished ones. Caring not to stay, to specialize in any *Fach*—on—on—to some new goal,—of which one must be English to know anything. It is the national insolence that has made this contemptible Island a World Power."

"But"—he paused solemnly, "it is the serious nation who works at the great subjects, not plays games with them, that will in the end, win the world. *Ach Gott.* It is *we*."

Hallowes rejoiced in the reasons which kept him from being turned out, he liked being observed just as much as the Professors liked observing him. Anything with a hint of danger and enterprise in it fascinated Hallowes. Work became fairly drenched in glamour. He outstripped even the German in his unremitting and laborious exertions.

The English boy does not as a rule shine in the Universities of the Teuton, but Hallowes under this agreeable

impetus, became as confirmed a sweater as though he'd been born and bred an Alien under the Eagle's eye.

The hint of enterprise and danger in Lasotovitsch appealed directly to him. He recognized at the second glance or so possibilities in Lasotovitsch. Once he set his mind to it, Hallowes was not long in discovering that what was baffling Heron and the others,—the angel's face on probably a low-down sinner—the mean mask that anyone but a Russian genius would be ashamed to be seen with,—was no mask at all, but quite fair and honest,—so far as it went,—and probably covered as much religion as it did sins.

Hallowes had played as good a game with religion as he had with everything else, and had brought as much on with him. He knew well enough, that the fellow was as honest inside and out as any of them, and knew just as well that the other fellows would find it out in time, and give the Russian his just dues. Meanwhile he'd find out if he knew anything about horses. He looked as though he had a seat and hands,—those long, supple, sinuous hands would handle anything.

Directly Hallowes opened the subject the eyes of the Russian lit up like flame, and Heron looked the other way. It embarrassed him to see a fellow shooting out emotion like that, and when Lasotovitsch began to talk horses with quiet well-bred passion,—it *was* passion,—anyone must admit that,—he naturally got rather red, and Hallowes grinned maliciously.

As Lasotovitsch told of the little strong shining creatures he knew on his kinsmen's estates in Bessarabia, his voice rose and fell, he turned English words to the most melodious uses, he might, according to Heron's abashed reflections, have been quoting poetry, but he made no mistakes, he knew what he was talking about.

After a moment's attention, Hallowes, in good horsy jargon, was as keen as Lasotovitsch, and Lasotovitsch was accepted lock, stock, and barrel, by the listening crowd.

Heron might be the social example, the Professors'

pride, and he could speak German like a native, but he had never ridden a flat race in his life and probably never would. He was on the high road to be a consulting Engineer, of course. Every one knew that, but Hallowes was on the high road to be anything, and the real leader of all of them. He beamed upon the Russian, and—the Russian had come to stay !

He listened with all his ears to Hallowes' vernacular, and—although good-natured to a degree, Hallowes sometimes forgot to translate, he understood mystically nevertheless, and gurgled appreciation in an attractive way peculiar to himself. It flattered Hallowes, it was the way he felt himself when talking of horses, but Heron having seen Mrs. Mirrilles' gratified face, and being acutely anxious to humour her, only just managed to swallow the gurgle with a commentless face.

The painfully deferential way in which the new importation waited to ascertain if Hallowes were quite finished before he burst forth himself also annoyed Heron. To be hanging on the utterances of a fellow like Hallowes you have to be shutting up every other minute if you want to get in a word edgeways, was a bit too much. But here again his good British fair play came to the rescue. After all, if the fellow, still more or less on his trial, had ventured to interrupt Hallowes, he'd have got short shrift from the rest of them !

He had a strong suspicion moreover that what Hallowes had seen in a flash he'd be seeing himself,—in a week.

Heron was as solidly sure of his own future as was Hallowes of his power over any future. He felt an assurance as well-grounded that he would probably be the more successful of the two in the end,—in the way your people appreciate,—and yet if there was one creature on earth whom Heron admired and envied it was Hallowes.

His own monument he felt sure would one day adorn the County Town, and his obituary notice would be in all the daily papers, he might even be a Baronet in the end, while Heaven alone knew what would be the end of Hallowes. And yet to the day of his death he'd always

be seven days behind Hallowes, and sometimes deep down he knew that in this sort of time measurement seven days may be as long as the seven days of Creation. And suddenly he told himself that he might also be seven days behind Lasotovitsch, even if he ended in a mad-house, or was pulverized by his own bombs.

For an instant Heron looked too sad for a well set-up solid personable youth predestined to success, and who had never given his parents a moment's anxiety. It was the recurring tragedy of sudden Vision to the prosaic hard worker, the cry of the wild to the sober citizen, the backbone of England,—the plodder who arrives,—and it hurts solidly, and bewilders vaguely.

Hallowes also had his little griefs, but his pain was all to come. His conscience so far was an instrument to cajole and not to castigate. He had wrought havoc in many a breast, caused head-shaking to the pitch of palsy, yet never in all his gay reprehensible life had he suffered as good, honest Heron, his parents' pride, who lived in favour with God and man, had suffered, and would suffer intermittently till death should deliver him.

For sheer malignity and insolence the sorrow for the glories we've foregone, beats all the others hands down.

CHAPTER XIII

“ ACH ! the horses,” said Lasotovitsch, with an eye that in an Englishman one would have called rolling, “ the horses !—they bring the high thoughts ! ” Heron suppressed a gasp,—Lasotovitsch was almost at home now in the genial atmosphere and more like himself.—“ The horse is the true comrade, he carries you to the wild winds where the high thoughts dwell, and understands you in silence. He betrays you not into speech, humiliates you not by misunderstanding. With the horse one need not suffer as among men we must. He is as the good wine, an equalizer and an expander. The want of the universal atmosphere of the stable in this so small clean town that so highly thinks of itself, is a calamity.” He paused to sigh with acute feeling. “ In this land of freedom one walks in chains, the thought fettered.—One cannot be for ever ascending the great mountains to set free the high thoughts. But to fly to the stable,—to mount the horse and away at full speed out on the wild steppe when the thought soars to Heaven ! ”

Again he glanced round sensitively for encouragement. He would undoubtedly have shrunk back into his own dungeon of dungeons had he discovered anything but tolerant expectation behind the amused stare. “ Ach ! my friends, one cries for the speech. One does not *speak* in this small nation—so small, so moral,—so cold,—so full of churches—that knows not religion, and is all good works. Religion, that rapture of emotion, *mein Gott !* it lives not here.”

“ Oh Lord ! ” muttered Heron.

"Shut up!" said Hallowes, with a deftly applied kick.

"Neither religion nor the true atmosphere of the horse," resumed Lasotovitsch. "Between man and horse is the great unity, the hideous necessity of mutual forgiveness does never divide us,—the horse and we." Lasotovitsch paused and cast an eye full of divinely innocent trust round the startled group, but again beheld nothing but an appreciative glance in the infantile orbs of Hallowes: upon this he concentrated himself,—and pursued his theme. "Ach! the subtle and intolerable pain of forgiveness. I am pursued by this tormenting presence. It will not leave me,—" he was aware of a certain vague inquiry in the air, and always diffident in regard to his English, he paused to make himself more clear.

"Just now, my friends, I suffer much. It is part of human friendship, one escapes it not. You will *all* know what the Greatest of the Sane and of the Insane has said,—" he glanced with trustful hope at Mary, and included the rest with a fine sweep of his delicate hand. Nor did he doubt for one moment the correctness of his surmise, his intimacy with young England being as yet in the bud.

"If a friend doeth theeé wrong, then say, 'I forgive thee what thou hast done unto *me*,—that thou hast done it unto *thyself*—how could I forgive thee that?'"

Again he looked for encouragement. The group bore up well. Possibly a warning glance from Hallowes quelled derision. The silence, however, seemed likely to last. Hallowes was plainly absorbed in lighting a cigarette, and Mary suspected that, with all his learning, he knew no more of the Greatest of the Sane and of the Insane, than the rest of them, so she plunged in herself, rather glad to shine for once.

"Then you still pin your faith to Nietzsche," she said as glib as you like. "I thought I noticed a tendency in some of the lectures to dump him into the valley of recently discharged gods with Hegel, and some of the others."

"Ach ! Madame, no—but no ! The few regrettable moments of divine insanity,—the drunken wrath of the Gods—dies, but their divinity endures for ever. The divinity that speaks to our hearts and our souls, and our hopes and our fears, but above all to our sorrows, what can kill ?"—He shrugged off some weight of woe and smiled. "The subtle pain for which here is no relief,—the poison for which there is no anodyne,—And it is these that sometimes we leave behind us at the stable door—And here on Madame's pleasant verandah, it is as though we stood in the true home of the horse, the atmosphere and the *bonne camaraderie* of the stable. It encourages the soul. Is it not true—my friends ?"

"Now," said Mary hastily, not daring to meet any English eye, "there's a charming compliment for you. Only you oughtn't to know so much of sorrow yet, Count Lasotovitsch. I hope your friend didn't do anything very bad."

"He took from me my beloved," said Lasotovitsch simply.

"Oh !" said Mary, with only the slightest suspicion of haste in the monosyllable.

The Anglo-Saxons, however, who knew quite as much of Beloveds, as Lasotovitsch did,—all stood at attention, a stout body-guard to folded virtue. The first unconscious impulse of youth who thinks it knows the world being always to take good care that its womenkind doesn't. Lasotovitsch meanwhile seemed to be muttering something at which they all cocked suspicious ears. It was apparently "the Sane and Insane" one again at his ravings, and curiosity for the moment overcame virtue.

"Thus speaketh all great love," came the mutterings. "It surpasseth even forgiveness and pity. I thought," said Lasotovitsch, "I had found such love in my friend and in my beloved. Now I must forgive the one—unforgiveably—and pity the other, pitilessly."

"Good Lord ! Shut him up, or I will," whispered Heron.

"Oh no, you don't," said Hallowes, "I think he's

harmless, and Mrs. Mirrilies is all for letting him have it out,—can't you see?"

Mary's attitude was only too plain to Heron's notions. He glowered. But perhaps since she was working for all she was worth at these Philosopher fellows, it was natural.

Mary herself was anxious to show Russia that England isn't all undiluted stable.

"But attend also to this word," she quoted vain-gloriously, "'All great love is above all its pity, for it seeketh to create what is loved. Myself do I offer unto my love, and my everything.' I'm wondering if the friend and the beloved were the only people in fault, if the love and the unselfishness were great enough in your own spirit."

"Ach, Madame, she was one to whom the high sayings of the Divine one do not apply. The dangerous toy, one too light for the great sayings,—too frail and faithless,—The dangerous plaything to the great mind—the recreation of the warrior. I being humble wanted not dangerous play. I wanted a pure jewel set in pure gold."

"You're very unforgiving," said Mary, her eyes on his relentless face.

"I experience no anger. It is not for me to forgive or to refuse forgiveness. The punishment comes to the thing that must be punished. The destroyer carries within him the power for self-destruction. One waits."

"But," said Mary, still vain-glorious and nearly choking with theory, "The soul is deep, it gusheth in subterranean caverns,—it is no mobile stormy film on shallow waters."

"But, Madame," said Lasotovitsch simply, "the soul in question was of my own creation. There was none in that rounded breast. 'When thou goest to women,' said the Great One, 'do not forget the whip.' I loved and trusted and forgot the whip. Frail and faithless was the Beloved, and I forgot the whip. I was not the first I have since found."

But if the boys had a trust to keep, so had Mrs. Mirrilies also, and no one could accuse her of not pulling in the rope she had dealt out too abruptly.

"I say," said she, "come in and have tea. If it's not ready it ought to be, and we'll have to hustle our tea-maker."

Tea was a sound, wholesome English meal. High thoughts were kept rigorously in their place. It was the time of Lasotovitsch's life. He revelled in new sensations, new food for thought; new points of view. They all danced deliciously, with occasional collisions, with the old. Above all he was getting intimate, ecstatic glimpses into the great English bugbear, Respectability. This incomprehensible fetish to the Alien, to whom the acts of the English are patent enough, but the point of view that permits or forbids them, so entirely incomprehensible.

Lasotovitsch panted to throw himself upon the impregnable position, as only a very young philosopher can. In the intolerance of breathless youth he felt a grave conviction that this respectability was an amiable creature at heart, that if properly approached would render up its secret. It was a very funny secret, of that he had no doubt whatsoever. A rippling gurgle of delight put down by the English to the fellow's appreciation of their conversation, was the result of his private cogitations on this matter.

There were breathless moments during that tea, but the Russian's behaviour to the little Moth won Mary's heart for ever.

After tea, Hallowes in his artless way drew Mrs. Mirrilies to that corner of the verandah furthest removed from the others, with Lasotovitsch in their midst, and put her courteously through her facings.

"You and Lasotovitsch seem to be out on a new game," he said. "What were you both quoting out of, just now?"

"'Thus spake Zarathustra,' by Nietzsche," said Mary.

"I thought as much. They seem to be soaked in him,—unless they're soaked in beer, but after all the

one doesn't prevent the other. Have you got him, Mrs. Mirrilies? Will you lend him to me?"

Mary paused, and looked dubious.

" You're the one single person of all my friends here I'd rather not lend Nietzsche to. If you read him he'll catch hold of you, and have an effect, and I'm not sure whether it will be for good or for evil."

" Now I like that! You land Lasotovitsch in on the top of us, and if ever a fellow was made to have effects,—and mixed at that,—it's he. And yet you don't want to lend me a book, for fear it may burn me.—However hot it is, getting it out of German into decent English 'll turn its fire to cinders, you may bet your life on that."

" You know your German is perfect, and if you don't take Nietzsche in the right spirit, he'll just burn you to the bone."

" Do you think he's burnt Lasotovitsch to the bone?" inquired Hallowes jealously.

" I think he has," said Mary, " or he wouldn't be hankering to apply Nietzsche's horrid little whip even to discarded Beloveds."

" Oh, that's the quality in the blood of both Lasotovitsch and Nietzsche," said Hallowes, in his light, shrewd, unexpected way.

One never quite knew what Hallowes did know, still less with what he occupied his, so to speak, unofficial brain.

" The fellow Nietzsche was three-fourths a Pole," he went on, " and though the Germans claim him for all they're worth, he'll not get properly acclimatized in Germany till Doomsday. I know that much anyway."

" Oh well," said Mary. " Perhaps it was the tragedy of the Past aching in him that may account for most of the insane things he says. He can be sane enough, and quite sweet and reasonable too, and as human as any philosopher can hope to be,—and although he vilified Christ as no man has yet done, he was sometimes very near Him, I think." Mary's quiet face shone in a way that Hallowes liked immensely. " Almost nearer, I

think, than any other philosopher of whom I know anything."

"And yet you want to head me off him," said Hallowes.

"You'll see him so differently from me," said Mary.

"Very likely, but it needn't follow that I'll see him all wrong."

"Well, no," said Mary, laughing. "I didn't imply quite that."

"You implied a good deal," said Hallowes, with a grin.

"Well, anyway, I'd like you to trust me with the fellow, but if you won't, I'll get him—somewhere,—and I'll go at him then till I get the hang of him."

"But," said Mary, appalled, "he takes time, and every hour is already filled up with your own work."

"There's not much going on now and I'll sit up a bit. I can keep awake all right, if I like a book enough to bother."

"You'll get ill, and what will your mother say to me?"

"Oh, something quite vague and charming," said Hallowes easily. "What she'll be really interested in is your scholarship. Besides, I'd rather be ill, than stand like a stuck pig while Lasotovitsch goes soaring off over my head."

"I doubt if the pretensions of the whole of Europe would make you look like a stuck pig!—But, do you know what you're attempting?"

"Probably not. Good thing too or I mightn't attempt it. I'll know soon enough. And on the whole I think I'd put this business through quicker than any of the others,—and someone's got to do it anyway."

"There's not one spark of seeking Truth for Truth's sake about you," she groaned. "You'll just fall to on it, to get the better of Lasotovitsch.—I wonder—I wonder," she persisted pensively, "what your father would think about Nietzsche."

"Read the last Oxford utterance about the fellow and you'll know. Catch my father attempting the ascent of Nietzsche without a guide."

"Only to think of what you're undertaking! Nietzsche

isn't the only one, and in this atmosphere of the stable he likes so much, Lasotovitsch won't spare you any single one of the host."

Hallowes whistled.

"In that case, I'll only have to keep pace with him," he said after a pause.

"And in that case," said Mary to herself, "I needn't always be worrying myself to death over—other things,—Hallowes will insist on a nightly audience to wreak his philosophies on."

"It's nice to be starting a colossal undertaking with so light a heart," she said, feeling now quite cheerful. "I only hope it will *keep* light."

"Oh, I'll see to that," said Hallowes with god-like calm. "We're not Germans, after all, to turn every little difficulty into a millstone round our neck."

"Oh, well," she sighed, "joking apart, I suppose you've got to do it now for the honour of England, and you're the only one who can. I wish you looked stronger. Heron," she resumed presently, "could do it, but he'd be too laborious,—too conscientious. You couldn't breathe in the air those two would choke up with big words."

"Well, I never! But I have a conscience too!"

"It's a little versatile, don't you think?" said Mary. "At any rate, it's one that will never depress a tea-party. Heron's might, if he weren't quite sure he was doing justice to philosophy."

"Well, who sprang Lasotovitsch on us? If I do peg out with brain fag,—or conscience,—you're the responsible party."

"In bringing in Lasotovitsch to tea, I never meant to bring Nietzsche too," said Mary on her defence.

"You did it all the same,—and will probably rob me of my night's rest for years."

"And perhaps make Nietzsche turn in his grave," said Mary.

"Do him good,—shake some of the nonsense out of him, and let in some common sense."

"Have you no reverence?"

"For the maggot the old chap seems to have set wriggling in the German brain?—not a scrap. The Slav fellows get more good out of him, I think. I say! Sneak the book off the shelf, will you? and let me put it into my overcoat pocket. I'm going to see Lasotovitsch home."

"You won't hurt his feelings?"

"I'll civilize one or two of them."

"Civilization isn't a purely English monopoly."

"It is,—but the fact still wants recognition by the less civilized nations."

"I'm inclined to think that Lasotovitsch, with at least a suspicion of culture, is a very necessary innovation," said Mary serenely, "and an inspiration on my part."

"It's the woman that inspires the big jobs, and the man that works 'em. Wouldn't mind being a woman myself for the next year and a half."

"You'd hate it. You couldn't be having your finger in every pie then."

"Oh! Couldn't I?"

"No, you couldn't. It's only just at first that you think you can. You soon find out——"

"Indirectly you're all over the place."

"But I like direct measures, and being first in just as much as you do."

"But we've all got to put up with a lot of indirectness, especially in the way of work, as soon as ever we put our noses outside England. We can't just slog in as we ought to be able to do, we're too busy keeping our eyes skinned, trying to keep England's end up. If the rest of England that sits at home and battens on its past, would bustle up and start making England's future, her end would keep up by sheer faith in itself,—as it used to do, not take all one's time keeping it stiff."

"Yes, I see,—the same sort of faith that will make you outstrip Lasotovitsch in the end. Meanwhile," said Mary, "speak gently to the erring."

"'The divine manner,' is there in my pocket," said

Hallowes noncommittally, "and you must be wanting a rest by this time. Your way as far as the Church is mine," said Hallowes to Lasotovitsch, "so we may as well start together."

Lasotovitsch beamed, and with a deep bow, a fervent gleam, and a thrilling hand-kiss to both the ladies, followed his leader.

Hallowes liked to let fellows with their feelings too near their skins, down lightly. So he reverted to horses for the length of the street, then in touching lightly and tentatively on philosophy, he elicited all the facts he was out for. It was always essential to get a good look in at a comparatively new subject before you tackled it. Then firmly, unswervingly, and with great ingenuity, he applied the facts he had just accumulated, slightly twisted.

The dreamer watched with apprehensive admiration the methods of the man of action, quite unconscious, in his naïve diffidence, and the rapid power of assimilation of the other, that the data, the accuracy of which he so whole-heartedly approved, had all been supplied by himself.

"It's been pretty much the same from the beginning, don't you think," said Hallowes after a passionate outcry of acutely modern thought on the part of Lasotovitsch.

"Aristotle and Plato used to say very much the same sort of thing, only in a more classical way. You couldn't imagine fellows draped in flowing robes, and cameo brooches, and all furnished from birth with Greek noses"—here he remembered his ignorance—"or Roman as the case might be, with the very pots and pans, the very cups they got drunk out of, all grinding dignity of demeanour, and reticence of speech into them,—howling with passion like the modern chaps. There's nothing new so far as I can see. It's just the old game."

"The divine discontent—"

Hallowes was sorry to interrupt, but, he had to get it out while he had it all properly at his fingers' ends.

"But other people besides Nietzsche sat in tubs and scolded," said he; "only they did it in the classical

style, with gesture to match, and a sort of leisurely Olympian god-like look about 'em. The new chap seems to be always in a devil of a hurry. He's all for getting it out in a gulp for fear of being interrupted.—Looks bad for the manners of the age, don't you think? He always seems as if he wanted to empty himself at a sitting. It's a bit too violent, don't you think, for the unlearned stomach? The stomach of the usual sort of fool likes that sort of thing in homœopathic doses, or in gilded pills. Flowing robes, you know, and Greek noses, and temperate language, not belched out with disordered action, and any sort of a nose.—Somehow that Philosophy that erupts itself like a volcano never feels washed," said Hallowes with cheerful audacity.

Lasotovitsch, though deeply interested, looked pensive. The Englishman with the so-young eyes, was difficult to put right at a moment's notice. To such an one the Message must be delivered in the way he will receive it, and Lasotovitsch, with all his burning desire to make space ring with his Message, perceived intuitively that in this case, the time for that had not yet come. He could not conscientiously gurgle, but he made a sufficiently encouraging sound to set Hallowes off again.

"It may all be racial," said Hallowes, with even a younger smile than usual. "The fellows that pounded the classics into us at school could always make infernal nuisances of themselves, but there was a sort of aristocratic seclusion and fastidiousness about them. They were gentlemen, in fact, and we couldn't somehow ever imagine a philosopher who wasn't. It gave us a sort of liking for prophets properly washed. It's insular prejudice, being a nation of hypocrites very likely. You're just as likely to be right as we are," said he, with sublime tolerance; "but we're made like that, and will have to stay made until we see the necessity for a change,—and then I daresay we'll creak round on our old hinges. Meanwhile, if a prophet feels bound to swear at his neighbour, he may just as well do it decently as not."

"And," he added dreamily through a cloud of smoke,

"there are lots of things it's as well not to discuss at all before ladies."

Lasotovitsch flushed sensitively. "I have offended then."

"You've done nothing of the sort. Only we keep the goings on of Beloveds you know and things of that sort, to ourselves, and since you're going to be one of us, you ought to know our ropes a bit. It's almost impossible to keep her out altogether, of course, she will slip in, but, oh, you know, keep her vague. Don't let her get too personal."

"*Gott Almächtig!*!" said Lasotovitsch.

"It's easy enough," said Hallowes soothingly. "You'll fall into it in a week. It's just as well you should make this small concession to the nation of hypocrites, don't you see?"

"I see," said Lasotovitsch, frowning with thought.

Hallowes having got out all he had to say waited with great courtesy.

"The Great One," said Lasotovitsch at last, "said that women will not think. The Englishman says that she must not think. She should if she can,—is what I, who know nothing, but hope some day to know all things, say. The English are as the mighty one with a colossal difference. They will swaddle the mouths of the little truths that hurt the ladies who know them—*mein Gott!*—and suffer from them, but must never understand them. All the little truths swaddled," murmured Lasotovitsch, "that they scream not, and disturb the ladies. Ach so! and under our cloaks we must carry the swaddled truths. And yet the life that lives goes not with swaddled mouth. It does scream, it does not consider the ladies. The aristocracy to which the old philosophy belonged cannot shut the little screaming mouth that cries sharp and shrill, so that the new people hear, and even the ladies do listen with one little pink ear."

"It's only racial really," said Hallowes, still serene and soothing. "You like your ham and anchovies served raw, we like 'em cooked, that's all the difference."

"And the Lectures? The gracious Lady is a good pupil. The Professors swaddle not the mouths of any truth."

"You don't suppose that any Englishwoman with her head screwed on will be stopped for a trifle," said Hallowes grandly. "But a Lecture room is one thing, and a drawing-room or what stands for it, is another. Don't you see?"

"*Mein Gott!* yes, I see," said Lasotovitsch after an interminable pause. "Madame she knows life. She has thought?"

"She knows it in a way, of course, and has her own opinions on it, but—oh! well, she doesn't sort of talk it out in mixed company. When you know her well enough she'll not funk warning you about lots of things in life. I can tell you that."

"And at other times the little truths must be put in the shameful corner like the wicked child?"

"That's about it."

"*Gott Almächtig!* So! You are a subtle nation."

"The conversation anyway is getting a jolly sight too subtle for me," said Hallowes, laughing.

"And the Miss?" said Lasotovitsch, "the lady who is adorable, but no longer young?"

"Unless you look out, you'll be the death of her in a week."

"Ach! That will I never be!" said Lasotovitsch devotedly.

"Talking of horses?" said Hallowes; "did I tell you?"

"Lord," said he when at last he strolled on alone, "that's the sort of thing to make a man take to drink."

CHAPTER XIV

IN spite of Philosophy, and boys, and Oliver the Less, and Tea-parties, Mary's restless heart would give her no peace. The letters of Oliver the Greater were so distracting. He wrote pages about all his doings, and told nothing about himself, and Barbara seemed always to be hanging round, interesting and amusing Oliver,—“but how on earth?” thought Mary confusedly. “Anyone in his senses to be amused or interested by Barbara! I do hope Oliver isn't sickening for fever.”

She looked again at the letter and was forced to admit that it did not sound like raving. At the same time Barbara kept on buzzing in her ears like a mosquito.

She was just then struggling through an unusually impenetrable German, and this continual buzzing seemed to make her mind wobble. She could no longer nail it to its subject.

“And to be put back by Barbara!” lamented Mrs. Mirrilies.

She hoped that the Germans were not undermining her reason.

* * * * *

It was now nearing Christmas, and the holidays, and the mountains weren't very far off. Mary was sincerely thankful. She was apparently in serious need of,—something.

She took long walks by herself, and short ones with Oliver, and uttered herself in parables to Miss Caldecott, but nothing seemed to affect the buzzing of Barbara.

It was simply impertinent of an unconsidered quantity like Barbara to be interrupting serious study across two Continents. And if Oliver wasn't sickening for typhoid the Station must be inconceivably dull to give any importance at all to any spoken word of which Barbara was capable.

If she were in any of her little sordid troubles, of course —then naturally she'd turn to Oliver, she had no one else, —and Oliver was very soft-hearted. But she seemed to be wonderfully well for Barbara, and peacocking round quite on her own, so far as Mary could gather.

It was puzzling to a degree.

In its dim pain Mary's heart turned to England, but came back discouraged. England can be every bit as lonely as Europe, and she couldn't sit down under the shadow of Oliver's mother just now. Nothing would induce her, moreover, to let Oliver be sung into blind obedience in the twilight, or to be at the mercy of a woman with a slave and a tyrant wrapped up in her. Some spirit of revolt she only partially understood, was at work in Mary in regard to the elder Mrs. Mirrilies.

Hitherto she had hardly criticized her mother-in-law at all. She had admired what she could in her, and left the rest. But now—she was beginning to resent her mother-in-law actively, for the sake of the two Olivers. No woman who had borne a man child should spend valuable time hanging withered wreaths on willow trees, and Mrs. Mirrilies had been at it all her life.

The odd thing was that things in Mrs. Mirrilies she had once envied and admired, she found herself now resenting more acutely even than she resented the funeral wreaths. Above all the apparently illimitable spirit of renouncement that distinguished Oliver's mother, and had always set her as one apart.

It now struck Mary that if you are always renouncing things on your own account, you'll think nothing in the end of letting other people renounce everything for you; they'll hate it, of course, being new to the business, while from long habit it's become your most exquisite enjoyment.

In short, Mary wanted a new Heaven and a new Earth for herself and her two Olivers, and she felt certain she would find neither in Cromwell Road, amidst the mouldering wreaths.

She paused with a pang of remorse to recall the religious rapture in Mrs. Mirrilies' Sunday evening hymns. It was honest, as honest as the rigorous virtue that inspired it, but it left her cold.

"The sting of conscience tendeth ever to sting," and the conscience of Mrs. Mirrilies, now that she was away from it, and dared to confess it to herself, had always been too much even for Mary.

"And once I was nearly as good as my mother-in-law," Mary thought, with a curious shock. She wondered what it was; what was wrong with her and with her world.

At any rate, a letter she had received that morning from her mother-in-law, begging her to bring Oliver over for Christmas, had brought about in Mrs. Mirrilies, an unprecedented amount of internal dislocation.

What she seemed to want this Christmas for herself, and her two Olivers, and for all the world, was,—was laughter at the top of its voice, if it liked; so long as it expressed real joy—extravagant, wild, unexpected, magnificent! And life living itself at full pitch, not cowering away under funeral wreaths.

For the first time in her high-principled life, Mary was being driven and pushed and prodded full in the line of least resistance, and the passive aloofness of her conscience was worrying her to death.

* * * * *

"Work's over for to-day," said Mary at last. "I'll go for an immense walk."

So booted and hatted she started for the road; up the high sleek hill flanked by beautiful villas and orchards, and cunningly and lavishly strewn with nice green seats for short-winded citizens, and little baskets for ugly human

remains. Then away from the villas out amongst the old beautiful farms, turned now to drinking and dancing saloons for a thirsty and pleasure-loving people, their snow-clad gables standing out of their ruddy wood yards, and lying as quiet and simple and picturesque as though still the innocent homes of thrifty peasants.

Everywhere the smooth surface of the young snow was being wrought into tracery of finest lace by the sun, and jewelled wreaths hung from all the trees of the wide woods running for miles along the foothills that encircled the lake.

Mary was soon in the heart of the woods, making for a high clearing she knew well, from whose wide open platform one could see, on a clear day, the curving sweep of the great mountains of Europe, one of the finest views in the world. From East to West past lakes of emerald, and jade, and sapphire, the giants stand sentinel, and on this early afternoon the air was as clear as crystal.

Peak after peak shone out pure and virginal in its fresh robes of snow, and each seemed to take a living, sentient pride in catching the sun's rays, and setting them to rhythmic strange dances upon their own sublime immobility, revealing with each stately measure myriad mystic beauties. The music of the spheres revealing itself in primeval dance upon the everlasting hills.

Mary watched the elements at play, breathless and absorbed. She forgot what had brought her out until an aching longing for Oliver to see the wonder of the sun upon the mountains also, brought back her mother-in-law with a rush. She brushed the feathering snow off a green seat and sat down.

But it was impossible to think out things. The sun had caught hold of all the rainbows of the world not on active service, and was winding them in and out the mazes of the dance, and when tired of dancing, the colours and the light melted and mixed, and then in one incomparable glory of radiance, the sun rocked over the mountains, and the snows returned to their rest.

And Mary, remembering that she had been warned a

thousand times that solitary walks in lonely woods where several murders had been committed were not only unsafe, but very far from respectable, turned hastily back down the ghostly arches of the trees, and fixed her mind on her mother-in-law and other problems.

There was a glory of great calm in the inviolable Silence of the woods, and presently it seemed to Mary that she was walking through the very atmosphere of faith itself. It encompassed and enfolded her, and lay in a little secret spring of its own in the heart of every waiting tree and shrub. And so each with its own private assurance of its own full possession in the ultimate fullness of life refused to be abashed by snow or frost, or hail, or storm, but just waited quietly for its own. In such an atmosphere Mary's whole being revolted against spoiling all their holidays for the sake of Oliver's mother.

Who perhaps wasn't so very lonely, after all. She had a God to love who quite satisfied her, and that seemed a great deal upon this sparkling night. Moreover Mrs. Mirrilies loved her own virtue also, and was as sure of that as of her God. She loved her memories too. She had had a variety of stirring experiences to look back on in the winter evenings. Mary remembered now with a sort of curious amused awe some of these she had divulged to her.

She had been tempted, and that more than once, and had always nobly resisted. In an odd chastened way these temptations had always been a sort of feather in the widow's cap.

Mary recalled it all as she went over the snow in the splendid silence of the faithful trees.

Mrs. Mirrilies was incapable of a lie or even of a pose in that sort of thing; but Mary remembered wondering at the time at the astonishing unction with which her mother-in-law had referred to these incidents. She felt certain that if such things had happened to her, wild horses shouldn't drag them out of her. It had then seemed an appalling fact, a thing to hush up,—to pass with averted eyes. If Oliver's mother weren't safe from such horrors,

who could escape? Mary had experienced a tornado of indignation against all men.

It had been a matter of such extreme importance then to Mary! Now as applied to a woman such as the elder Mrs. Mirrilies it didn't matter really in the least. The only thing that did matter was her mother-in-law's speaking of her surprising experiences in just the way she did. To her immense astonishment Mary laughed out into the crystal silence.

What had come to her, and all her points of view? *to her conscience?* She could dismiss her mother-in-law with a laugh, and not feel even a brute for refusing to bring Oliver to Cromwell Road for Christmas. It would be like looking back now to go to the great dull charnel-house of a place—looking back into death instead of forward into life.

She paused to try to feel right, and at least a little remorse for her selfishness, and to fix her mind upon the self-denying ordinances; but it refused to be fixed—to budge from her importunate self—that clamoured for freedom and not for sacrifice.

"I'll just have to go on and look forward," said Mary breathlessly, "to something. I'll just drop the unessential things and make for the essential.—I wonder which is which—I don't know in the least, but I simply can't feel Cromwell Road essential to any one of us just now, and she never had any right to sing Oliver out of the Cavalry into the Engineers. I always knew she hadn't, and now I'll just say it out! And I can't go back into the past picking up other people's wrong-doings and trying to put them right. I might lose the next instant, and that's the most important thing in the world. All that you can do for your own miserable past, or for anyone else's, is to squeeze all the good out of it you can, and get it soaked up into the present by hook or by crook. The present is your child after all, while the past is only your grandmother—it's like disturbing graves and forgetting there are such things as resurrections. I'm fearfully sorry if Oliver and I make her lonelier, but we've got to go on—

on, and on, and on, whatever happens, and not back.—Oh, you just let me alone!" said Mary to a sudden prick.

"However much your grandmother is responsible for you, you're not responsible for your grandmother. She's ceased to be an acute incident in life. And on a night like this," said Mary, drinking in the sparkle and flash in the air. "There's such a thing as self-sacrifice becoming a scourge, isn't there?—It's robbed life, after all,—it's killed growth,—it's stopped enterprise,—it's limited the scope of all of us. There's something extremely retrograde in the self-sacrificing woman.—Oh, stop, for goodness' sake, and let me speak as I feel, out here in this air, where you must say, for once, what comes first! I'll be as bad as the rest of us when I'm back in stuffy, God-fearing rooms. I know that the necessity for self-sacrifice lies at the root of all religion and of some philosophy,—more especially when it's in German. And it's all so petty somehow, so petty and slavish. It's like feeling you give real pleasure to God by going without marmalade in Lent. At any rate," pursued Mary, running down a silver slope, "Mrs. Mirrilies just for the moment is the past, and Oliver and I are the present and the future, and we must follow the future up hill, not down, or we'll burst," said Mary, with a disreputable chuckle.

"And then," she said a moment later, with a face that looked as though it would never chuckle again, "I believe Oliver's points of view would be farther away than ever in Cromwell Road. And no matter what his points of view may be, I want *him*—oh, I want him!—and—and—and—crying?—this wonderful night!"

Mary scorned tears, or even a pocket-handkerchief as applied to them. She shook them out of her eyes, and tried to concentrate on the last Lecture, but all she could concentrate on was the something that lay behind just one of the little minutes out of the millions that awaited her.

"And perhaps I'll not see it when it comes," said Mary, with a dreadful sense of depression. "Perhaps it will be

waiting for me, to sort of reclaim it, and bring it out into the light ; and it may have to go back into the shadows, amongst the other lost and disabled things, and wander round looking for someone else to deliver it. And if I do see it,—I never thought of that !—it may scare me ; I may take it for a ghost or—or a tramp."

Mary's caught breath went out in a half-articulate squeak, for just ahead of her emerging from a clump of trees, two sinister figures cast gigantic shadows on the snow.

" Now philosophy," said Mary, making a bold bid for courage, " just keep your end up, or what's the use of you, anyway, and—and why didn't I bring a stick ? "

" Mrs. Mirrilies ? " cried two welcome voices.

" Thank goodness ! " said Mary.

" Fräulein's pretty nearly off her head."

" I hope she hasn't sent Oliver off his."

" Oh, Oliver's all right, but old Herman's swearing like mad."

" Didn't think he had so much good feeling," said Mary light-heartedly. It was so good to be with friends.

" Good feeling !—Sound commercial instinct. Think of the slur on his Hotel if you were robbed and murdered. Anyway you might have considered *us*. It's not safe."

" But how on earth can you find out whether it is or not, if you don't try ? " said Mary, still light-minded from sheer relief.

" Nice doctrine that ! " said Hallowes severely. " Talk of Nietzsche after that ! "

" I spoke as a fool," said Mary, " and I have the grace to acknowledge it, which Nietzsche never has."

" He left that to Time, and the superman."

" Or to other fools," said Mary in her gentle way. " Set a thief to catch a thief. Let's talk of nice open English fires or of the dances up at St. Moritz, and plum puddings from home—anything sane and simple, and leave that creature."

" You've decided on St. Moritz then ? "

" I didn't. It decided itself this very minute."

"Were you quoting poetry or anything when we came up?" said Heron sentimentally. Mrs. Mirrilies looked ripping in the moonlight.

"Not I. I was calling on philosophy to come to the rescue for once in its life, and wishing to goodness I had a stick."

"Now there's the history of English philosophy for you in a nutshell," said Hallowes self-righteously. "We don't seem to absorb it in the wholesale way those other fellows do. We give it house-room all right and a fair trial. What we find useful we hold on to and use—and chuck the rest. We don't let it accumulate in our systems so as to clog action, like the other chaps, and we always keep our fighting arm free. Don't suppose a German just now would ever have thought of his stick; he'd have been too swollen out with philosophy, you know. They all keep pulling slabs of philosophers out of their insides, and chucking them at you till you don't know whether you're on your head or your heels, and then they go off shouting '*Deutschland über alles*,' and thinking you a half-educated ass. It's the most difficult nation in Europe to keep your end up to."

"Oh! for goodness sake," cried Mary, "leave high thoughts, and Germans, and other indigestible substances, and be insular, and easy and English to-night!"

"I like that! Who started it all? Who discovered Lasotovitsch and let him loose on us? You simply refuse to face the consequences of your own action. You dropped Lasotovitsch like a bomb into the midst of a peaceful community. For reasons of patriotism, not to say self-preservation, we're driven into the lowest depths of philosophy. We're soaking and drenching ourselves in it to keep even with Lasotovitsch, and you expect us to come out of the bottomless pit just as we went in. You've taken the fresh English bloom off us for ever, Mrs. Mirrilies. We'll be sort of mongrels by the time we're through with your importation."

"Oh, well, anyway, you needn't be prigs until you've learnt to be philosophers," said Mary. "I'm just

moithered with speculation. It's the air, and the lectures, and you."

" Us, indeed ! It's the latest addition."

" No, it's you. He hasn't had time to affect you yet ; you get old before your time here. I like you best young and callow. One is less disturbed about your future ; you're only subject to the usual idiotcies then. Here one never knows," sighed Mary. " The foreigner is used to his own ways ; you're only amateurs in them. It's like the difference between the Roman Catholic born and bred, and his Protestant understudy. I don't know that all this alien and unnatural stimulation of the sleepy old lion is good for him."

" Catch 'em stimulating us !" said Heron, with stolid arrogance.

" They do, in spite of you. It's inevitable in this air. These very woods are haunted with the ghosts of philosophers all tearing their phantom locks because even now they can't find out everything, in order to conform it to the German outlook, and impose it upon the world. I might have been wrestling with the stiffest Lecture my head is so tired. The wisdom of the Teuton is most fatiguing. I don't wonder that so many of them come to England to rest, and get so slack that they forget how to spell their own names. We all want a change to refresh our jaded minds. Dances with a whirling variety of partners, ski-ing, and luging, and ice-hockey. We want something lighter and more malleable than the brain of the Teuton to pit ourselves against. And," said Mary, laughing, " all of us together ought to be able to take off even one little ounce of the stigma attached to the English name abroad. Perhaps being all friends together, we might be the forlorn hope of our misguided nation, and diluther them all into liking us for what we are, instead of hating us for what we have. I can't bear being disliked when we're so nice at heart really. You're the very dearest boys in the world for letting me get all my ill-humour off on you. If you hadn't I might have spanked Oliver. There are more things in these

woods, I think, than tramps.—Here we are! I'll not ask you in, because late visitors always disturb Oliver."

"I say," said Hallowes, as the two went on, "let us dine in the restaurant round the corner. I told my old woman not to wait."

It was a silent meal. Hallowes seemed to be pre-occupied.

"Wait a mo'," said he, "till I light up."

They went on down the street in silence.

Heron's affection for Mrs. Mirrilies was mute and unconditional. Hallowes', although ardent, with considerable depths in it, was yet critical. Even on his death-bed Hallowes would be interested and amused in discussing the situation.

"I'd like to meet that chap Mirrilies," he said at last. "It would take a lot of philosophy, or a little common-sense to understand him."

"What are you driving at?"

"Mrs. Mirrilies," said Hallowes with serene finality, "is a bit too young for her job, and a jolly sight too like us. I can't put it into words, not being Lasotovitsch, but she is."

"Oh! Shut up!"

"Poking round finding out things for herself," pursued Hallowes serenely, "is what she's out for, just like ourselves. A crack or so on the head won't hurt us; but for her,—you see,—women aren't used to that sort of thing."

"Mrs. Mirrilies isn't a fool," protested Heron.

"Lord, no! If she was, she'd poke for ever, and never strike a stone wall, or anything else."

"Cousins of mine know Captain Mirrilies, and they say he's the finest fellow going."

"Catch her looking at him if he wasn't," said Hallowes, with a touch of proprietary pride; "but it's the finest fellows that run the worst muckers. It wasn't religion Mrs. Mirrilies was after out there in those woods at this hour of night," said Hallowes thoughtfully. "I wish it

was, in a way. If it was only that——” He paused, and Heron said quietly, but with one of the most stupendous efforts of his life and a scarlet face :

“ It’s a good deal. I wish you’d give it a trial yourself, Jim, you know.”

Jim started. He had always somehow felt the religion in Heron ; and was glad he had made no mistake. But to get that sort of thing into words is a grim job. He wondered at Heron, and felt rather hot himself for a night with an edge on it as he looked for words.

“ I’m not running down religion, don’t you think it.—The more women have of it the better for themselves, and everyone else. I mean to have a proper look in at it myself when I’ve got some of the rot it talks out of my head. Being brought up in the bosom of the Church somehow puts you off. You’ve got to pretend such a lot to ease people’s feelings. And never daring to thresh out anything, it gets clotted up in your inside, rot and all. And later on there’s no time, you know, to sort it out.—Anyway it’s not religion that’s troubling Mrs. Mirrilies.”

“ Mrs. Mirrilies is the last woman living to go round gassing.”

“ She wouldn’t, but you’d know. My mother, and my sisters, and cousins, and aunts, want religion in just the way they want silver spoons, and table-napkins. And it seems to be the right way for them,—I don’t believe, for a moment, that any one of the lot of ‘em would even know how to sin, you know—if they tried—but Mrs. Mirrilies is different.”

“ Good Lord ! ”

“ Oh, dry up, will you ? She’s as good as they make ‘em, but she’s a jolly sight more like us than one single one of our mothers, and sisters, and aunts will ever be. And life for us,” he continued, with a glint of the wisdom of all the ages standing straight up in his infant’s eyes, “ even if we take it a bit easy, isn’t all beer and skittles. All the soft jobs seem to have been jumped by women,—the sort of women belonging to *us*, you know. We’ve got to find out, and finding out often gives you pepper.

—If I'd the luck to marry Mrs. Mirrilies, hanged if I'd let her go wandering round woods on her own, and I enjoying myself out in India ! ”

“ He's not enjoying himself,” said Heron, “ he's working.”

“ Men can't work without enjoying themselves. Women can. That makes all the difference.”

“ Mrs. Mirrilies may be wanting to get the hang of us so as to buck us up, not like most women who start on us before they know a hang about us. It's just the sporting sort of thing she'd do.”

“ It might be a jolly sight too sporting for her own comfort.”

“ She wouldn't consider that. Women never do. They only think of *you*.”

“ She's not a woman through and through, I tell you.”

“ If you had less imagination and more sense you'd do better. To think of Mrs. Mirrilies trying to ape us ! ”

“ Did I ever say she was trying to ape us ? There's a lot of *us* in her, which is another story altogether.”

“ In that case,” said Heron in an offended tone, “ she was probably trying to get over us in the wood.”

“ Perhaps,” said Hallowes noncommittally. “ If she was, she'll probably succeed in time. Mrs. Mirrilies isn't the one to be beaten ; but as she'll be fifty or so when the job's through, it won't very much matter after all.”

“ I can't imagine,” said Heron with dogged loyalty, “ that Mrs. Mirrilies could ever stop mattering.”

“ Oh, well—nor I. The part of her that's Mrs. Mirrilies, but the other part will matter in a milder way for all of us at fifty. You see no constitution could stand it. Anyway I'm not so sure,” said Hallowes presently, “ that I want Mrs. Mirrilies to hurry up getting over us. She wouldn't be half so nice if she did.”

“ Good God ! Do you think Mrs. Mirrilies wants the like of us or of what's in us to improve her ? ”

“ But I believe it's there already,” said Hallowes thoughtfully, “ or how'd we get it ? I believe they've been afraid of it, you know,—and small blame to 'em,

and hushed it up. I believe myself, in trotting out things and sort of breaking 'em in ;—keeping a vicious filly in the stable won't teach her not to kick. I know that.—Are you coming in ? "

" How can I when you're up to your neck in work ? "

" Oh, well, *I* wouldn't have prevented you."

" But you'd jolly well have sworn at me,—when it was too late."

CHAPTER XV

MARY had always kept up a desultory correspondence with her cousin and Miss Gaunt, and all through the season she had sent remittances to buy asparagus for the Teuton stomachs that craved, and had then insisted upon the bottled article to keep under the mortal ache.

It was becoming quite a problem to Miss Gaunt to explain this continuity of abundance to Ella.

And then one morning, to her astonishment and delight, if a little to her embarrassment, Mary got a letter from Cousin Ella announcing in agitated thankfulness the inheritance of a legacy which would make her and her beloved friend independent, and deliver them for ever from the intolerable tyranny of the foreign governesses.

"I have done my best to love the poor women," said Cousin Ella, "strangers in a strange land, and not one with any provision for her old age, and thanks be to God in many instances my efforts have been successful; but, dear Mary, of late years I have sometimes only been able to pray for them. Needy human nature is, alas! most trying. I am glad to be delivered from it in the Lord's good time. We have sold this place to the large German who, to my astonishment, had saved some money. She will, no doubt, make it pay."

"She will," said Mary, laughing. "The P.G.'s will be shrieking for asparagus for years to come, thank goodness!"

She was reading the letter aloud to the little Moth,

who was deeply interested in Mary's minor affairs, and knew all about her asparagus plot.

"But, Mrs. Mirrilies," cried Miss Caldecott, "you surely couldn't be revengeful?"

So dearly did Miss Caldecott love her idols, and so happily was she constituted, that she could never see a crack in them, and if the public did, she thought it very likely that the fault lay with the public's own eye. If the idol itself had its doubts, her first impulse was to reassure it, to put it in a better light, or rub it up with a little spiritual plate powder, just as she did with the Church brasses. Miss Caldecott was consumed with the passion of the holy housemaid.

"I have no personal spite against the large lady," said Mary. "She gave me excellent advice, and plays like an angel. But I can't bear anything so frail and delicate-minded as Cousin Ella to be wearing itself out praying for a fine, flourishing intellect that's perfectly well able to take care of itself, and feeling all the time that she's not doing it right. Cousin Ella is very humble and sensitive, she'd know in her bones that her poor little insular imagination could never soar to the God complacent or colossal enough to deal with the pretensions of so superior a person as Fräulein Becker."

"But—but why are you so hard on her?"

"Am I hard? I only happen to know a little about her. I think really I'm rather grateful to her on the whole. She brought home my own ignorance to me. She also gave me an insight into that of my nation, and so prepared me for the general opinion of Europe."

"Oh, Mrs. Mirrilies! How can you?"

"But you've lived in the midst of it for years."

"But I've consistently refused to listen."

"And if I didn't listen with all my ears, I'd 'bust.'"

"Dearest Mrs. Mirrilies, don't you love your country?"

"I do, like anything, but I don't love its stupidity. Your country is like your child: the more you adore it the more thoroughly you can spank it."

Miss Caldecott shuddered.

"Please don't let us think of such horrid things, and go on with your letter. I knew you'd never be revengeful for yourself."

Mary laughed. "I've never been tried yet."

"I do so wish you wouldn't always be making little of yourself. It's like a bad dream. One knows it's foolishness, but it worries."

"But haven't you ever been disappointed in a friend?" said Mary, her curiosity getting the better of her good taste. She was paid off for it, however, in a way she little expected. Miss Caldecott got slowly livid. Her very lips were white.

"Yes," she said at last, "I've been disappointed for thirty years in the friend I loved best."

"Oh, don't!" cried out Mary, with a gesture as though to push back those thirty cruel years from the white helpless face. "It's—it's not fair."

"Please don't say—confusing—things, Mrs. Mirrilies," she said at last. "I do so want to feel right in this—this old sorrow, and I'm quite absolutely sure that *you*'ll never disappoint me."

"I'd be a brute if I did. Women are horribly good," sighed Mary. "I wish I were like them."

"You're ever so much nicer," said the idol-worshipper. "Go on with the letter."

"And now, dear Mary, for another great surprise! We are both longing to see you. Having come back into our life again, we don't seem as if we could bear you to go out of it for very long at a time. So as you have decided not to come home for Christmas, but to go to St. Moritz, we have decided to spend part of the money Fräulein has given us for this house—we can well afford it,—in going there too. Fortunately we have not quite forgotten our languages, and are daily diligently practising them."

"Can't you imagine the old dears!"

"It will be delightful to go once more to a real Hotel. Our little trips abroad of late years have been spoilt, to some extent, by cheap *pensions*. But, thank God, that also is at an end. Prices we find have risen. We don't want to bother you, dear, only to be near you, so we haven't even asked where you are going. We have taken rooms in a nice quiet hotel, where the English who are not very gay and rich go. It will be like renewing our youth, and I hope we may often have little Oliver. We're sure to find nice children to play with him, since he loves them so."

"There! That's all, except loves and things."

"What a dear woman! Why aren't you quite glad, Mrs. Mirrilies?"

"Now there you are again! You often jump into my mind in the sudden way Oliver does, and find me out."

"But you couldn't mind me," she said wistfully, "any more than you could Oliver. We're both so sure of your mind."

"The thing is," said Mary pensively, "that I'm not so sure myself, by any means. And—don't you see, I'm going up there to enjoy every single thing that comes, like anything, and to look round, and find out things for myself, and to hustle everything out of every modern point of view I can strike. I love fooling round new things, and it's a tendency that grows! and my old dears may distrust the tendency and the points of view."

"I distrust them also," said Miss Caldecott, prim and decisive; "but I trust you, dear Mrs. Mirrilies. It will no doubt be the same with your friends."

"I wonder if it will? I'd hate to damp the joy of their first real day out for twenty years."

"You couldn't damp the joy of anyone."

"But I don't want to damp my own joy either. And don't you see our joys might clash."

"I doubt it," said Faith, Hope and Charity.

"I don't altogether," said Instinct. "At any rate,"

said Mary, "I'll see if we can't meet and all go up together. Then I can fix them in. They'll find things rather different from when they were last abroad."

"Oh, Mrs. Mirrilies, do!" cried the little Moth with passionate earnestness. "We come abroad now in such hordes, and we're all so much alike. We so often say we're vegetarians, and we order so few drinks, and sometimes I am afraid we make a fuss about our bills. At any rate we are very unpopular with the Hotel keepers. Are they teetotallers?" she anxiously inquired.

"No, only from necessity. They drank good wine upon the Hills, and were rather proud of their cellar."

"Oh, thank goodness! You must start them in the right way. It will make all the difference."

"But I never drink anything, and will always have to be unpopular from that point of view."

"But you can have tea at their hotel," said Miss Caldecott, with marked anxiety. "And when your young friends——" She broke off gasping, scared to death. "And," she murmured, with a pallid giggle, "I a total abstainer myself for thirty years!—But indeed I could often wish I wasn't when we all go together up to the mountains and are all total abstainers, and the head waiter brings the wine-list.—You know what a very expressive face my dear mother has."

"I do indeed," said Mary with conviction. "I believe you have to pay almost an exorbitant price for your principles, Miss Caldecott. I'm glad the old dears haven't principles in that direction."

"Oh, I simply can't help it; so am I!"

"Oh, well, I'll see they placate the powers that be. We'll all help. The old dears shall bring custom to the house or we'll know the reason why."

"I'm so glad you'll introduce them. It will give them importance at once," said Miss Caldecott, still somewhat breathless. "It's dreadful to be just like the others. To have the waiter's calculating eyes on you always. He seems to follow you with a doubt,—even in your sleep. After the first meal the Director doesn't trouble even to

look at you, and that's worse. It's more pointed and personal. It's knowing so many of us and finding us so much alike. And it's even people who, I am certain, do take stimulants at home, and can well afford them, who make England so sadly misunderstood. I was once in a very nice Hotel, we lunched in the Restaurant, and one day just as lunch had begun a dear old clergyman came in. He was an Archdeacon, and I am sure he was a saintly man, he looked so venerable. But oh dear ! I could almost have wished he didn't, and was just worldly for once. In the most dignified way he ordered a bottle of soda-water, knives, and forks, and plates, and emptied several paper parcels on to them and ate his luncheon. A quite audible giggle ran all down the room. It was one of the most awful meals of my life.—How can you any longer wonder at our comparative unpopularity ? ”

“ I'd like to be able to oblige you and drink like a fish,” said Mary thoughtfully ; “ but since I can't, I'll see that the others do.”

“ But,—but,—it needn't be intoxicating liquors. So long as it's liquid, they'll charge four times over for it and be quite satisfied.”

“ Dear Miss Caldecott, you just trust England to me and the boys.”

* * * * *

When Mary met her old dears at the station she was quite proud of the addition to the party. In order to do her credit the ladies had outdone themselves in coats and skirts, their neat grey heads were surmounted by irreproachable travelling hats. Their luggage light and sufficient. Mary felt quite elated. She had perhaps felt less so had she been aware that both the ladies in their halt in Paris had permitted an *artiste* in corsets to work her will on them, and were now enduring untold agonies under the pressure of a complicated arrangement of unaccustomed bones. Portions of their person never before imprisoned now groaned in bondage, and all those stricken hours from Paris, they had sat up as straight as bodkins, since lying down

made matters ten times worse, and they had nothing else to put on.

Neither of them had reckoned with the fiendish accumulative torturing power inherent in the corset guaranteed to defy time itself, and had left those in their possession to be reorganized by the *artiste*; moreover, the woman, who, when on her travels spreads herself in the eyes of a grinning Europe, was anathema to those high-minded ladies. They were resolved that, at all costs, their well-tailored garments should still encase them like a glove, when Mary saw them, and scorned to complain even to each other.

The dispensation pressed the heavier, perhaps, upon plump Miss Gaunt. She feared more than once that she must succumb. She bore up, however, and her fortitude was well repaid.

Mary's approving eyes and Oliver's instant adoption of her as "Aunt" were full compensation for her sufferings. Moreover, she discerned a glance of pleased surprise in the faces of the two nice youths laden with rugs in the background.

After one glance at such well-corsetted elegance, Miss Caldecott was aware of her own formlessness, and shrank back behind the boys to wonder a little at Mary and her fears. Women as uncreased and upright as that after a long journey would surely hold their own anywhere, and what on earth must *she* be like in Mary's eyes?

She was wishing she had put on her best hat when Mary seized her, and brought her into the middle of the group now waiting on the platform, and she was soon her gentle self again. She was finding out to her great encouragement little points of likeness through all the unlikeness that had abashed her, and before five minutes were at an end she had decided to go back to the corsets she had renounced some thirty years ago, with tears, as a concession to family prejudice.

So if the Paris corsets brought forth their meed of suffering, they did their little bit of good also; they gratified three worldlings, and gave fresh courage to one small saint.

She smiled to the last on the gay party, then went off to

slave' happily for three mortal hours, for having perfect trust in her, her genial tyrants had forgotten many things in the last throes of departure, and they all seemed to be acutely important. They gave her only the crumbs from their table,—those tyrants,—perhaps one couldn't expect any more from such vivid, vital, selfish creatures out for adventure, but Miss Caldecott was well content with it.

It was the appreciation without which the sensitive soul of a woman must fade and wither. The beautiful gift that the poorest may bestow,—and that the richest,—throwing gold broad-cast, so often withholds, not knowing its priceless value.

Cousin Ella finding the double duty of accustoming herself to the society of young men and her corsets a little too wearing, declined upon Oliver. Fräulein was taking a holiday before joining her charge, and Oliver recognizing, like the rest of his sex, a willing slave at a glance, used her to the utmost.

Miss Gaunt dropped into the current of young life like a fish into water.

The ragtime views of white mountain and green lake through a wild whirl of snow increased the general lightness of head and heart, and all went merrily, until as they were all alighting at the journey's end, Cousin Ella uttered a little squeak, and tottered.

From the amazing rigidity of her form Mary divined the truth.

Although she had in a measure missed the fullness of the estate, Mrs. Mirrilies had all the intolerance of the young married woman. She sent the boys on with Oliver and the luggage to her own hotel, loosed the bonds of the prisoner, hustled her into bed, and the instant she could catch her alone, burst out at the poor, fat guardian angel, still in agonized bondage.

“ Oh, how could you let her ? ” cried Mary.

“ It was for your sake, my dear.”

“ As though I'd mind ! ”

“ You'd have minded very actuely if two frumps had descended upon you.”

"As if I could want her to suffer like that!" rampaged Mary. "You shouldn't have allowed it."

"I defy anyone to protest once she'd delivered herself into the hands of that *corsetière*."

"Beast!"

"No. She was a great artist."

Mary snorted.

"She needn't have put the screw on all at once then; even the Inquisitors didn't do that. If her ribs had had an ounce of flesh on them, they'd have reverberated like a drum."

"She'd better tap me," thought Miss Gaunt grimly. "I'd reverberate to her heart's content."

"I'll feel her every day in future," pursued Mary.

"You're as intolerant as when you were eighteen," said Miss Gaunt, regaining her spirit. "Your hands will be quite full enough with those boys, and Oliver, and,—um—other duties. You just leave Ella's ribs to me."

"When I think of that poor little unyielding body I feel more selfish even than I thought I was."

"Oh, I thought conscience came in somewhere! Never mind, my dear, we both came fully prepared for selfishness, and to enjoy ourselves tremendously in spite of it, which the past generation frequently refuses to do. It prefers to scold the present. Good-night, my dear. Oliver will want his supper."

"Well! To suffer to be beautiful is bad enough, no doubt.—It's not for me to say," reflected Miss Gaunt, as slowly and painfully she crawled up the stairs, "but to have to suffer only to be still so fat and ugly that no one even suspects your heroic endeavours in the other direction isn't so exhilarating."

CHAPTER XVI

THIS was Mary's first visit to the high mountains. She had been conjuring up visions of it for weeks, and the next morning, from the moment she got up the immense intoxication of the high places of the earth was upon her.

She dressed under a spell. She dressed Oliver also under a spell, and made hay amongst his buttons. She ate her breakfast without knowing what she ate, and she let Oliver eat what he liked. What mattered anything but the new world, and the new life in her blood?

Her hands trembled with eagerness as she dressed herself and Oliver to go out, and although she was vaguely aware of the fact, she permitted Oliver, as eager as herself, to escape from her hands with one gaiter askew. To get out into the middle of it all without a moment's delay was the one thing needful. The rest could wait.

She avoided the boys, and fled from the chattering crowd out into the great white silence under the sapphire sky.

The sun with regal insolence was already turning the great cold mountains into the playing fields of His Kingly Majesty.

Mary walked Oliver off his legs and clean forgot her old dears.

" You might have left word where you were off to," said Hallowes in gentle expostulation, when he met her on her return. Heron said nothing. He looked wounded.

" Oh, Oliver and I wanted the first sight of everything to ourselves," said Mary lightly—too radiant to be disturbed by feelings.

"Your cousin and the other lady were round looking for you," pursued Hallowes.

"Goodness gracious! I forget them."

"Oh!—We tracked you for an hour, then went to see about the ski-ing and skating," said Hallowes, still kind and patient.

Mrs. Mirrilies' face seemed to be shining in a queer way at something quite apart from them. And she was burnt too. This went dead against all Jim's æsthetic principles. He hoped it wouldn't show much at luncheon.

Meanwhile Heron had Oliver's leg up against the frozen bank, and with painful effort was putting the gaiter right. Hallowes wouldn't have done it to save his life, and in a curious jealous way he resented Mrs. Mirrilies forcing this job upon Harry. It was unlike Mrs. Mirrilies, and hardly playing the game, any more than letting herself get burnt to a brick before anyone could look at her was. Could she by any chance be going off on her own, getting away from them? Was that to be the result of the holiday?

"But I can only skate until Fräulein comes," said Mary, too self-absorbed to discover offence. "My cousin and Miss Gaunt will look after Oliver while we're skating, but one couldn't expect them to toil up the hills after us."

"My new Aunts said they'd come everywhere," said Oliver firmly, the ache in his legs suddenly snapping off. "I'll go an' ask 'em."

"You must have a rest first, and be tidied up," said Mary, Oliver's appearance at last recalling her to motherhood.

"Oh!" Oliver's eyes widened with disappointment and the ache pounced back into his legs. "I thought nuthin' mattered in mountains. Crooked gaiters,—nor coffee as strong as strong,—beautiful!—nor nuthin'."

"Nothing ought to matter," said Mary recklessly, "but unfortunately it does. Come and lie down. We're still in the world, and I thought we'd got above it. And, Harry," she wheedled, with a deprecating glance, "couldn't you do his gaiters till Fräulein comes?"

"My new Aunts'll do 'em," said Oliver proudly, "not big mans."

"I say, darling dear, that's a snub for me. I'd better do them myself, I think."

"No," said Oliver, taking her hand, and suddenly feeling that a little rest would be rather nice, "my new Aunts'll do 'em—an' all the horrid things, and we'll just look at you, like me an' the old Aunt at home always does."

"But, Oliver," said Mary, as they went up hand in hand to her room, "I'm not a selfish pig."

"No," said Oliver sleepily, "you're you—and we're—us."

"But I do things too," she pleaded.

"But you can always leave 'em, an' talk. You're darlin' dear, an' my muvver, an' we like lookin' at you."

"But, little dearest, the description is so utterly inaccurate, and not me at all."

But Oliver was asleep in her arms, and Mary put him thoughtfully to bed.

"That's it," she reflected, "the usual Bird of Paradise person I've always detested. Dear me!" she glanced in the glass, and perceiving in herself a tendency to liver-colour she put cream on her face, and went out on the verandah to see the mountains again,—but Oliver's little sleepy words seemed to shut them out. She could see nothing but her other Oliver keeping Christmas in the dust and heat of a dull Station, and Barbara buzzing round, probably sending him ridiculous Christmas cards that demanded a reply. It seemed to be Barbara's fate to be the last straw in everything,—Barbara! and on such a day!"

Mary tried to cast her out, and to lift her mind to the mountains, to that shining immensity of white and gold. She wanted to recall the careless rapture of the young morning. The wild leap of her spirit, the glory of the day. But such things don't come to call like dogs, and other human creatures. They slip into the soul from everywhere when they can find a soul with room to hold them,

and Mary's soul just then was hardly big enough to hold herself, not to say Infinity.

Oliver slipped in indeed, a pain and a problem, and very far away. He left her world empty, and she wanted it full to the brim. With an odd half gasp, half sigh, she let him slip back to his lonely work.

She felt like a wrong note in a great harmony. Oliver's summing up of her, the attitude of her little Court,—everything was disturbing. And,—it had all to be reckoned with.

Of course she was pretty, and she had a good figure, which she thought with sudden happy surprise was getting better, and she wasn't a fool—very far from it!—and people liked her. If they hadn't, the loneliness would have been rather more than she could have borne. She was doing what she was out for, too—finding out things.

Even from the Lectures she was getting some little idea of the complications to which one's inside,—no matter how simple and straightforward it may appear,—is apparently subject.

Moreover, in its task of clearing up the obscurities of human nature, Psychology had sunk human nature in darkness so impenetrable that she could never again dare to judge, much less condemn it. This made for charity, and other high virtues.

The boys, to be sure, had thrown light upon much of the darkness, but only in spots.

To penetrate the illimitable mass of the gloom was apparently the work of a lifetime, and Mary was in a hurry.

She moved restlessly from one foot to the other, and tried to get absorbed in the shining marvel of the sun now at play with the crystals, but no such luck!

What the boys had revealed, and the Lectures concealed,—had made her kinder—perhaps had even made her sweeter, she was so sorry for boys and so fond of them, because Oliver would some day be exactly like them. And if one can't dare to judge mankind at large until one has read every word the books have to say about him, it makes for

patience, besides cutting you out of a very great pleasure for the term of your natural life,—thus getting in the other virtue of self-sacrifice.

The Lectures at any rate were not entirely thrown away. Mary kicked out viciously at a stool not the least in her way, and sighed.

Mankind was getting too big for Mrs. Mirrilies, so again she declined upon herself, the last refuge of the baulked ; and since oneself and mankind are one, it is, after all, but falling from the frying-pan into the fire.

She was different from what she used to be,—that was plain. Everything was different. People even looked at her differently,—what was worse, they felt her differently.

Not the boys—oh, no ! not the boys, she thought quickly. She had always been so glad that she had come across the boys. She was the usual episode, of course, but that she had happened to them just at the right time, in the right way, was a great joy to her. Some day Oliver might remember, and be glad too, and perhaps fall on his feet also in the same way.

But that morning at breakfast she had noticed a difference in the men.

The glory of sun and snow had wiped it from her memory, but she remembered it now as a thing that might mean something, and might recur. Hitherto Mary had been singularly free from self-consciousness. No inward menace had ever warned her. Nothing that could call for self-consciousness had ever seemed to concern her,—herself.

To inquire into things, and investigate them in the interests of purely impersonal erudition was another story, of course. But now it seemed that there was something in herself, as well as in Oliver, that was not only getting different, but seeing itself differently, that was even wanting to assert itself—express itself,—something passive that was becoming active, recognizing its right to take its share in things.

Something in herself seemed to be struggling out from the rest, steadyng itself on its own legs, and standing

over against the rest demanding recognition, and seeking expression.

It was all very disturbing and perplexing.

Mary went to the glass to do her hair. The cream had done its work, her colour was pure again, and soft, and transparent. It struck her sharply that she was beautiful now, instead of being just the usual pretty. It was really rather exciting. She caught herself in the very act of breathing more quickly, and laughed.

"As though it mattered," said Mary.

But it did matter. She knew it mattered. She felt that it mattered. It mattered so much, that it made her do her hair better than usual.

Being used to have everything done for her in India, had made hair-doing rather a burden, and she often hurried over it. But to-day it interested her; she liked brushing and twisting the shadowy soft masses. She was delighting in them, and lingering over them for themselves. She didn't remember until the very end, that Oliver had delighted in her hair too, and lingered over it in very much the same way. It made her hair seem as alive somehow as the rest of her. As though it were enjoying itself also, consciously, and asking to be admired.

"If everything's to burst out like this asking for its ridiculous rights, what on earth's going to happen?" said Mary, surveying her handiwork in the glass with pride.

"I don't believe in too many lectures on your inside"—she paused thoughtfully, the tail of her eye still on her hair—"it makes it uppish and rather self-assertive."

She went to the window to try to disengage her wits from their perplexing preoccupations.

"I wonder," she said, with a sharp tap of the brush on her palm, "if anarchy is in the very air of this smug Republic?"

¶ And for answer a great golden blaze of sunshine flooded the room.

"Oh, and to dare to call it names!" cried Mary, "to dare to do anything but cringe in abject gratitude, and

adoration, before the sky and the streams, and the mountains of the little parochial prodigy!—It's certainly the one and only mountain-producing mouse of the Universe!

"And to be thinking of one's poor little self on such a day!—Oh, well!—One won't have much chance now Oliver's awake!"

Oliver's little sleep had done him good. It was like dressing a flame to get him into his clothes. And this time Mary was rigorously exact with his buttons. Mother and son had a trying time of it.

When they came down together, the guests, happy and hungry, and glad of a new arrival to discuss, while they were waiting for luncheon, glanced with interest at the pair. Even as a baby Oliver's movements were curiously rhythmic. Directly he could stand at all, he could stand on his toes, and weave strange little dances to his own little songs. Whenever he was unusually happy, he danced like a leaf in a light breeze. He had danced all the morning with the sun on the snow, and in his little sleep he had danced in a dream. He danced by instinct, and rather like a flame, and woed eyes to watch him, just as a flame does. And now utterly unable to keep still, he coaxed his hand out of his mother's, and danced out on a little trip of his own. He couldn't help dancing any more than a flame could, and went in and out of the laughing groups, with eyes like stars fixed upon some object all their own. No one could resent the passage of Oliver. He turned the quite simple entrance of his mother into Hotel society into something of a triumph.

"Looks a bit too young for the place," thought Hallowes, his solicitous eyes glued to her every glance.

The night before, he and Heron knowing better than to stick themselves forward, had taken up an obscure position in the vicinity of the bar. Heron had soon fallen asleep behind an English paper, but Hallowes kept portentously awake, and before the evening was over, he felt as wise as an owl, and at least thirty-five. He sat near enough to the bar to miss nothing, and what intellect failed to assimilate, instinct supplied.

This would account for a certain air of fussy motherhood apparent upon the otherwise extreme youth of his countenance as he now approached Mrs. Mirrilies.

"The head waiter came to me just now," he said. "He thought I was your brother, or——"

"Oh!" said Mary, laughing.

"And as a matter of fact I didn't contradict him," pursued Hallowes with a solemnity unbefitting his years.

"Good gracious! Why not?"

"It's not exactly—er—a Sunday-school here, and——"

"Jim! You're not proposing to chaperon Oliver and me?"

"I'm not a born ass, Mrs. Mirrilies," said Jim huffily.

It was all very well taking things lightly, but the habit was growing on Mrs. Mirrilies, and she'd be overdoing it next. He knew women. In the midst of languages they don't altogether understand, and a public opinion not in the least like their own, women want a man hanging round to see that things go right. And—— Hallowes glanced apprehensively at his charge. She needn't have done her hair like that, anyhow—in this crowd.

"You see," he said, looking unusually modest, "that everyone's up here on a spree of sorts, and they always have a way of spreading themselves on mountains, so don't you think it's just as well we all hung together?"

"Oh, well," said Mary, "I'm quite resigned. But where's Oliver?" she said, making a sudden dive after her son, and causing a man to look at her in a way that annoyed Hallowes. It was a harmless glance enough, very unaffected and spontaneous, and considering how charming Mrs. Mirrilies looked in her brief pursuit of the flame, the admiration in it was quite excusable.

"The head waiter," pursued Jim on her return, "asked me to choose a table, and I thought you wouldn't mind. I got one near the window with a splendid view, and out of range of the full glare of every blighter's eye."

"But I hope we can see the blighters," said Mary anxiously, "even if they can't see us. Are you sure the blight is so widespread?" she inquired after a

moment's inspection. "They all look rather nice I think. And—oh! who's that?" she said, with a perceptible start, her eyes resting on the man whose glances had annoyed Hallowes.

"Oh, he's some fellow from the provinces, I believe. His name is Turton," said Hallowes, with a markedly careless glance.

"Oh, well, at any rate *he's* not a blighter," said Mary. "He's extremely like my husband. This is the first time in my life I've ever seen anyone else the least like him. I hope we'll get to know him."

"There's not much doubt about that," said Hallowes grimly, remembering the look.

"You and Oliver are going to be tremendous favourites," said Heron, with simple satisfaction, returning from an errand upon which Hallowes had dispatched him. "They discuss everything here at the top of their voices—the English, I mean. Just look at some of them! If they only said the things in a quiet way—but to be yelling them out!—they all want to freeze on to you. You'll be slipping into all the good things going before we can say knife."

"Now that's you all over, Harry," said Hallowes gloomily. "You'd walk through Hell and see nothing to make a fuss about. Last place going where anyone ought to slip except on the ice. That's the worst of learning languages. You hear too much, especially about your own people."

"Oh! I say——"

"Oh, shut up! *You* were snoring over the *Graphic* when it started."

"You might have given me a kick," said Heron, as red as a turkey cock.

"Yes, and have you out punching their heads without waiting to inquire. If we're such asses as to give them cause to say things, we can't expect them to hold their tongues."

Mary looked attentive, which was precisely what Hallowes intended her to look. The bitterest blow to a

clever young man is the inattention of the adored. He felt much happier.

"Was Mr. Turton there," innocently inquired Mary, "when the foreigners were leaving us without a shred of a character?"

The spirits of Hallowes sank to zero.

"Yes," he said in a depressed tone.

"But was *he* passive and indifferent?"

"Now I come to think of it he didn't say a word."

"But how did he look?"

"He hadn't time to look. He was listening for all he was worth."

"I daresay he hadn't looked at a foreign language," said Mary, "since he left school. I can just imagine Oliver in the same awful hole. Dying to be at them, but his natural sense of fair play keeping him quiet,—till he knew."

She laughed, but her eyes were fuller of dreams than of mirth. "I daresay Mr. Turton sat up last night with Hugo, and will soon be quite equal to shutting them up. Just like you with Nietzsche and Lasotovitsch."

In spite of himself Jim was mollified. When they went in to luncheon Mary plumped down in the best place for purposes of observation, Hallowes having marked that place for himself, and tucked Oliver up in his napkin. "Now make the most of your time, Oliver," said she. "Fräulein comes to-morrow—and then it's the children's table for you."

"Oh! chillen's table?—Is that why I couldn't find em?"

"Was that what you were after just now?"

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, "an' I couldn't stand still no longer. An' mountains is nice," he said, after a long stare, "but I don't like bein' stopped by 'em,—I want to get over. I wish I could fly—an' big womans could."

"And so do I, Oliver, and we'd go off together. We'd fly south like the swallows."

"Widout our dinner?"

"Oh, no ! Flying needs strength,—we'd eat an immense dinner and then start."

Mary was restless too. The mountains seemed to shut her in, and Oliver the Greater out.

"I don't like bein' stopped," persisted Oliver the Less after his soup.

"Neither do I," said his mother, with a horrid little inward shiver.

"I'm just morbid," she thought. "And with all this glory,—and with Oliver in my very pocket. It may be hunger."

So she ate, and laughed, and defied the menace that had slipped in implacably from somewhere. She also took care to lose nothing of all that went on. And presently a large fair woman, clothed in pale blue, studded with *motifs* of the finest Nottingham lace, one of which was attached to the very centre of that part of the person the French, with delicate precision, describe as *le séant*, sailed in. She presented a startling back view, and engaged the courteous but absorbed attention of a *chic* Frenchwoman. The languid dreamy eyes of some exquisitely dressed Italians dwelt for a moment upon the curious spectacle, and then lifted themselves to the mountains as though to disembarass their gaze of the momentary offence. A party of Americans almost wished they didn't speak English like natives.

She advanced with majestic tread a yard or so in front of a mother so small as to be almost microscopical, a withered anxious atom scored with the criss-cross lines of petty cares. The blue lady disposed herself carefully all down one side of the table, and motioned to her mother to take a seat opposite her, then said an obtrusively silent grace which yet reverberated in every brain present. She addressed the waiters with large condescension in a French entirely her own.

She condemned the soup as water and grease, and sternly commanded her mother,—plainly faint from want of food—not to tempt Providence by touching foreign fish. She had no conscientious scruples in regard to wine,

she proclaimed, but the charge for "vinegar" in these Hotels was a disgrace to civilization.

Then having chosen something that was at least wholesome she whipped out the *Daily Mail* from her pale-blue bag, propped it up against the water-bottle, and in a sonorous voice with great carrying power proceeded to instruct her small twittering mother—swallowing, in feverish haste, all she was permitted to consume.

The *Daily Mail* was at that period strong on Germany.

Miss Pringle read on lusciously, until at last disturbed by the spasmodic fidgeting of her parent she laid down the paper and fixed her lorgnette on the culprit.

"But, Mother, aren't you interested?" she expostulated.

"Oh, my dear, yes; but I think it hurts the waiter's feelings. He's gone away behind the screen, and I heard something like a sob."

"You're hopelessly sentimental, Mother. He's probably sneezing."

"And I fear there are others also who may understand."

"I sincerely hope there are, and that what they hear may do them good. Temporizing is beneath the dignity of a great nation. It's quite time someone spoke out."

"But, Bertha, when one remembers the things those German ladies said of us yesterday; you were asleep, dear."

"But why didn't you shut them up?"

"But, Bertha, I quite agreed with them. We do do these things."

"If we do, I have still to learn it." She paused, her inexorable eyes making a triumphal round of the room. "And I should like to catch the person who would venture to apprise me of the fact."

"But, dear Bertha,—we're not all like you."

"Now, Mother, do attend!—And I'm sure that cheese *soufflé* is much too rich for you."

"It's very good, Bertha."

"It's not very good for you, though. Waiter! Take

this away and bring some plain hard biscuits. Of course, you haven't thin Captains."

"No, Madame, I much regret——"

"But, Bertha, I don't like thin Captains," wailed the victim.

"I will bring Madame what she will like—what for the stomach is most good," cried the kind little man, moved to the heart by the sufferings of Madame.—He was an anarchist by profession.—He disappeared like a streak, while Miss Pringle was recovering from the indecent intimacy of foreign manners, and presently returned with a box of biscuits strong with cheese, cayenne and celery, as stimulating as vermouth, unearthed from some remote *cache* only known to Alphonse and his Maker. And being a student of human nature, he knew that anything she imposed upon the stomach of her mother, this daughter of virtue would herself be careful to avoid.

Mary's enthralled attention was recalled by a slight squeal. Oliver had suddenly toppled over on to a vulnerable spot.

"But, Oliver," inquired Mary, as she set him up again, "how did it happen? What were you at?"

Oliver was no coward. He was keeping down howls with a strong hand, but to be in agony, and at the same time reviled by your own muvver, was bad to bear. The squeal might have risen to a howl, had not the blue one looked round and quelled him.

"Oh!" said Oliver briefly, and swallowed the rest.

"But, Oliver—how did it happen?" persisted Mary. It was so unlike Oliver!

"I was wantin' to see how she stuck it on, and if sittin' on it made it hot and it would come off and fall," said Oliver simply.

"Stuck what on, darling dear?"

"The white ting behind—an' tryin' to look all round her——"

"I see," said Mary. "But, Oliver, it's not paste, dear. It's good strong cotton, the best English make. It will never come off."

"Oliver," said Jim, "you're a man of taste. I'll take you skating after lunch. And now, Mrs. Mirrilies, with that sort of thing to judge us by, don't you think it's just as well to pause before we start punching heads?"

"Oh, but it's an extreme example."

"Well, yes. But it's our monopoly. There's not another nation on earth to compete with us in the article."

* * * * *

It was Oliver in the end who introduced the man to Mary. He brought others, hosts of them, and his mother was just aware of them, and no more. Winter sports under such a sky were all-absorbing. Oliver was as light and lithe and deft as a flame, on the ice as elsewhere, and a go-between in a thousand—he was still at large, Fräulein being detained by the illness of her mother—and full of eager hospitality. Always ready to offer the best he had to his mother, he now brought each new friend and generously bestowed him.

It was a royal time for Mary and all her satellites. No one was left out. Each new friend, when he seemed ready to sit still, was brought up and deposited, as one in need of their services, beside the new aunts happy in the sun, for now that the corsets were reorganized, the world was all rose-colour, and it was pleasant to be of a little consequence once more after the long years of obscurity.

Hallowes, with his uncanny intuition, knew that this trip was like a new *début* to the old ladies, that Cousin Ella at any rate was all atwitter with maiden tremors as to her reception in this great cosmopolitan world, and shrinkingly apprehensive of snubs, so partly out of sheer goodness of heart, partly because it amused him, he appointed himself the *preux chevalier* of the two ladies, and was indefatigable in their service.

It would have been unconditional bliss to Cousin Ella, had not a well-meaning blunderer asked if the tall young man with the nice innocent eyes weren't her grandson. That hurt her to the quick. Some women never outgrow any pain. The years seem to do nothing for them at all.

They are always the servants of the past. Miss Gaunt, waist-deep in the present, wished with all her heart he was her grandson, and watched Mary.

Mary was very much alive indeed, and Miss Gaunt doubted grimly if she would any longer be safe in a regiment.

She looked down the ice at the swift fine poise of Mrs. Mirrilies. She attempted no tricks, but she did all the ordinary movements beautifully. And now with one man, now with another, she looked the very spirit of joy.

There were younger and prettier women, and incomparably better skaters, but Miss Gaunt's keen eyes detected in Mary something they had not. She didn't know what it was, it puzzled her and it made her watch Mary.

She seemed to be as universal as Oliver in her choice of partners, and to like them all as simply. Then suddenly Miss Gaunt started just as Mary herself had done some hours before, as a man taller and broader than most of the others came up and joined Mrs. Mirrilies.

Miss Gaunt was struck by an extraordinary likeness to someone, a curious disturbing likeness,—and there was a subtle change in Mary's face.

CHAPTER XVII

OLIVER THE GREATER lay extremely ill on his string bed, worse than a man of his build ought to be, worse even than the height of his fever warranted. The symptoms pointed to mind, as well as body, and worried the Station doctor used to good straightforward complaints. There were men, of course, from whom one might expect abnormally disturbed cerebral action, and others of whom one could think better if they did show a symptom or so of it. It would argue that they were still in possession of some sort of a conscience. But Mirrilies was the last man who ought to be developing this sort of thing. And yet he muttered, and murmured, tossed and moaned, stretched out clutching hungry hands to the empty air, and his eyes made unpleasant mute demands, searching each face in turn. And now, broken at last by disappointment, he had turned his face to the wall and refused to stir, or to take nourishment, or swallow his physic, or do any other of the reasonable things doctors expect as part of their perquisites from sensible men.

Mirrilies of all people to be going off the track like this, heading straight for disaster!

Then, by good luck a well-known consultant passing through the Station on his way to a case, saw Mirrilies, and prescribed a recent discovery of his own, which, if anything could, would turn the scale. The patient, however, in course of treatment would need the closest watching. It was a case where moments mattered.

The stars in their courses seemed to fight against Mirrilies. At this juncture his nurse went down with

ever, and every other nurse except one in whom the doctor had not the slightest confidence had gone to the Hills, or else her hands were more than full. It was not a case for technical knowledge. Any sensible woman could manage the job.

Doctor Mason passed all the Station ladies in rapid review. He telephoned right and left, but three women were ill, and the rest away.

"Thought I might catch one of 'em," he reflected, and when she *was* caught——" He shrugged his round-shoulders.

There were Mirrilies' servants, of course, loyal to the bone, tender and deft, "but a man so near death as Mirrilies," the doctor thought kindly, "ought to have some of his own people near. This is a white woman's job." He went out on the verandah to think, and there, drawn and pale, was Mrs. Quayle making inquiries. He had always looked upon her as a poor thing enough, and what was she doing here? He remembered someone saying that she was going to the Hills to stay with a friend. It struck him suddenly that she and Mirrilies were rather good friends, and little as Station gossip interested him, he remembered hearing scraps of amused comment on the weird friendship.

Mrs. Quayle had herself well in hand when she came forward and asked a question or so that showed more discrimination than he could have given her credit for.

He made no secret of the critical condition of his patient, or of his own dilemma. To find a sensible woman, where one has suspected a fool draws out a man. Barbara was soon in possession of all the facts, and rapidly formed her plans.

"Why are you here?" he asked suddenly. "I thought you were off for a change. The rest are gone."

"I couldn't go until I knew," she said simply. "Mary Mirrilies was my greatest friend in India. At least," she corrected herself and blushed, "she was kinder to me than anyone else has been, except her husband. I have no technical knowledge, Doctor Mason, but I have had

a good deal of practice in nursing. I won't say I'm a born nurse,—every woman says that,—but at least I can be absolutely obedient. Will you explain things clearly to me and trust me till you can find someone better?"

"But," he said, hesitating, "you're not very strong yourself."

"I'm stronger than you imagine. Besides, it's Hobson's choice, isn't it?"

He laughed.

"You have me there, Mrs. Quayle. And there's no time to lose. Just come here and I'll show you everything. Common sense, care, and obedience are the only qualifications necessary, and these I'll get from you."

He explained the symptoms for which she had to watch, and the rest, then glanced again at her fragile figure, and her white face.

"And now," he said, "you must go home at once, have a good tea, and get into your loosest things. Don't hurry. I have plenty of time to stay till you come back."

Barbara held her hands tight down in her lap as she was driven home and stripped every atom of expression from face and bearing. She knew too much of Indian households not to be careful in every detail. She went in calm, and unhurried, and prosaically stated the case as her ayah helped her in her preparations, wrote a letter to Major Quayle, who was away shooting, so that if opened, must fully satisfy her mute censors, and an hour later, when Dr. Mason had resumed his rounds, he no longer regretted the sudden collapse of his best nurse.

"She'll do," he said, "and, poor thing, she's as safe as a church."

He drove on placidly, and presently a rather vivid memory of Oliver Mirrilies' handsome wife drifted into his mind. "And as good as she is handsome," he said, and then he whistled. "But why the deuce isn't she here?" he said. "It's hard luck on a child to be without his mother, of course, but it's harder luck on a man of Mirrilies' age and build to be without his wife."

"Mary, Mary, Mary," muttered Oliver, clutching and picking. And once he said wearily: "Why aren't you here, Mary—now?"

For hours Barbara could do nothing but harden her heart, and steady her hand, and be obedient and infinitely tender,—with burning passion pouring spirit and soul into Oliver's depleted being. She could be everything but good!

But at last when the violet twilight fell upon the earth, her courage was high enough even for that. Then she sat as still as the stillness that enfolded her, and spoke to him of Mary. Of her love and loyalty, of her kind heart, her largeness of outlook, her splendid sanity, her influence and effect. She made Mary, what Mary at that very moment was groping after in a great darkness. She made her absence just now a disaster indeed, but a necessary everyday thing that had to happen.

She spoke on in her quiet, monotonous voice with a curious confidence that even if the sick man's wild brain was wandering off on its erratic course, there was something deeper down in Oliver that would eventually understand. So she spoke carefully with well-chosen words. She spoke better than she had ever spoken before, and above all she was sincere.

It was a dreadful day for Barbara, her ordeal of fire,—but she passed through it unscorched, and in the evening, when the doctor came to release her, so satisfied was he that he let her stay on, and even permitted her to get what sleep she could in the adjoining room, giving her full authority over the night-nurse.

Day after day she watched, and waited, and tried to help Oliver back to life from the very gates of death, and over all the rough places by her amazing revelation of Mary. For knowing love she became a Seer and knew all things, and in revealing herself she revealed the innermost part of them.

And at last Oliver woke up one day to see Barbara, very white and pasty, and thinner than ever, sitting patient and emotionless beside his bed. It was an uneventful

coming back, but Oliver sighed happily, and was glad of life, for, in a strange way, Mary and the boy had grown dearer.

Barbara's efforts had apparently been successful.

When Oliver had taken all that Barbara gave him, and rested a little, he had strength to notice how worn-out she looked, and to make rather feeble inquiries, the answers to which he only half took in. Coming back from a long journey tires a man.

As he fell asleep he felt rather sorry for the women who show fatigue in every line, especially when they're so immensely good to a fellow, and a quick exultant pride in Mary's perennial freshness was his last half-conscious sensation.

Barbara, with a wan smile went out to look at herself in the glass.

"Poor Oliver!" she said. "And poor me!"

Then she went back to her valiant fight, for Oliver was not safe yet, by any means. There came days when the doctor looked grave and worn, and Barbara's heart failed her for fear, and these always followed the day of rest sternly imposed upon her by Doctor Mason.

Upon these days Oliver tossed and fretted in his great loneliness, and Mary who had seemed of late to be about the house again, was a Continent or so away, and the gulf of parting had widened to Infinity. Possessing all things, yet having nothing is a problem to a man too weak and devitalized to be a philosopher.

Although his patient would have been a dead man but for one of the least of them, upon these occasions the good old doctor cursed women.

It was after the second of these relapses that Barbara began to speak to Oliver in his right mind, just in the way she had spoken to him when it had gone wrong. As she spoke she swallowed her shyness, and nervousness as best she might. She spoke as she saw,—seeing herself,—She saw Mary as God saw her,—as she was meant to be, and "thus she reported"—still in the same toneless, monotonous voice, so long repressed that it had lost

most things. But the words welling out from a source only just tapped nothing could repress, they sparkled and ran free, and renewed hope in the heart of a man.

Presently the work that could only be accomplished in the name of Mary, being finished, and the source inexhaustible, Barbara let the pleasant waters flow on in their healing course, but never once did she really forget Mary, or fail to give her first place. Barbara's conscience was still indefatigable. But she supplemented Mary. She let her wander in and out of everything in life, made her part of a thousand things quite remote from Mary, as Oliver had known her. She added on to Mary in fact all that Mary lacked, and in her great new knowledge she made no mistake.

No one could look much pastier than did Barbara all this time, but it was a joy to listen to her. One felt Mary not very far off, and hope was in the air.

It was no trying of her powers with Barbara; no unleashing of her spirit this time. It was greater than all that, more insidious and more dangerous. It was love showing all her beauty in the beloved's name.

It was curious that all this time Barbara's attentive conscience did not warn her in a more all-round way. But in the beginning Oliver's danger put conscience off its guard, and later,—well later,—pure, perfect, personal joy, can deflect the stoutest conscience.

Besides, conscience after all was in no sort of way goaded, or pushed aside, for was she not rigorously careful in always giving Mary first place?

By the time Oliver was convalescent, Mary was dearer than ever she had been, and she loomed larger, greater, and more splendid in his mind, but he was nothing like so lonely, and he had begun to depend a good deal on Barbara.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was not until long afterwards that Mary knew for a certainty how sick unto death her husband had been. Upon this matter Barbara did not expand, nor did the doctor, and of the scope and extent of the ministrations of Barbara he said little. Barbara naturally was silent on the subject, while for some reason he could never quite explain to himself Oliver Mirrilles did not altogether convey all that Barbara had been to him, and done for him.

This was a mistake upon the part of Captain Mirrilles. If his wife did not know the facts, she felt them, and exaggerated them, and bitterly resented them. Barbara floated in and out of things more and more, and as Oliver now wrote without an afterthought of depression, and never even hinted at any desire ever to see her again, the existence of Barbara was beginning to make Mary almost reckless.

Something in the vivid air, the perennial merriment of the English group that has cast the dust of convention off its shoes for a week or so, to be found in every Hotel, all tended to increase this lightness of head in Mary. There were other things also that gave the reckless note.

Everything contributed, the freedom of the great hills, the exciting contact with wild hearts that have thrown their sorrows to the four winds, with wild hands, that have thrown their caps over the windmill, but who all had money enough, and charm enough, still to rub shoulders with the elect on neutral territory.

To one accustomed of late months to women, and

children, and boys, the adult tragedy, adult comedy, adult passion and pain in the sparkling air, were all acutely arresting.

Mary felt her womanhood above all, her ignorance and her power, and she was consumed by a great curiosity. She knew that there was some great thing that she had passed by. She often felt rather bleak and denuded in this crowd that had passed by nothing.

She knew herself to be conventionally, immeasurably better than most of them, being English alone would have taught her that! yet in the oddest, most exasperating way, they were nevertheless all richer than she.

It was just at this juncture that the Guardian angels of Mrs. Mirrilies became most keenly aware of their responsibilities. They could not make out what she was after, and why, although outwardly docile enough, yet in a queer way no one could quite put into words, she eluded their best efforts.

In his precocious talent for eliciting information Hallowes soon found out volumes. He was constantly rescuing Mrs. Mirrilies from undesirable associates. Mary was amused and good humoured, but she also liked making investigations and was too fine at heart to want really to shock anyone. Moreover although the boys thought themselves responsible for Mrs. Mirrilies, Mrs. Mirrilies thought herself responsible for the boys. In their interest, she could have denied herself everything, but this was her affair altogether, and didn't concern them.

These people were miles in advance of the boys, and had a clue to things as yet a mystery both to the boys and to her. They had rejoiced and suffered as she had not yet done. They were probably extremely wicked, but yet she felt shallow beside them. They made her feel them, as she was perfectly certain she had never made anyone feel her,—and—Oliver would have understood all about it!

So although she took every care not to hurt the feelings of her guardians, Mary went on in her simple straightforward way, making friends with the beautiful women

who never encroached, and the courteous men whom life seemed to have calmed a little. Although infinitely more witty, they were quieter than the other foreigners. . .

In spite of her diffidence in regard to her own powers, Mary made herself a good deal more felt than she ever suspected,—and drew many a gentle smile from this discreet company of sinners who had covered their tracks.

Even the women smiled kindly, as they might have smiled at a young girl.—She was no rival of theirs, this Englishwoman who had never lived.

The man so like Oliver liked the growing popularity of Mrs. Mirrilies amongst this pleasant crowd as little as did the boys. The dreamer, who could be practical enough when he chose, was getting on very well with his conversational French and German, and took an acute interest in all that went on around Mrs. Mirrilies. He couldn't get over the fact that the strangely consorted group she chose to be interested in, did reign supreme in an odd way, and this had an attraction for Peter Turton that it certainly had not for the boys.

The note of finality in it, with life not half done, appealed to the strongest part of the man, while to the boys it looked like failure pure and simple.—A man to put himself too early in the shade, or to let himself be put there by anyone else, was a thing no fellow could understand. Peter Turton understood it, or thought he did, and in the most extraordinary way in the world he was afraid for Mrs. Mirrilies; who yet was the last woman in the world to call for any man's fears.

She was steady and sure. She was devoted to her boy, she spoke of her husband without any after-thought,—simply and with dignity. From her voice he knew she loved him,—in a way,—and yet there was something else. This he did not understand. It was something she had *not*, and it was the want of it that made him afraid for her.

He knew quite suddenly one day that it was this very want that fixed the attention of the distinguished, although slightly sequestered group of foreigners, upon Mrs.

Mirrilies. It was a want they had themselves plainly never experienced. He was sure that this want picked her out, and made her alluringly new and stimulating to people a little jaded perhaps from too great an abundance.

At any rate it made Mrs. Mirrilies extremely interesting to Peter Turton himself. He found himself spending a great deal of his time taking observations upon Mrs. Mirrilies, and it struck him more than once that he might be better employed.

He threw himself therefore more vigorously than ever into all the winter sports. He was an expert in most of them,—but unfortunately so also was Mary, more or less. They were always meeting on ice and snow. He and Mary's old dears had struck up a cordial friendship, and they had started tea-parties on their own account by this time, so they met there also.

He could never escape from the atmosphere of Mrs. Mirrilies, or from the want that made him afraid.

They saw a great deal of each other—Mary and Peter Turton, and he was startlingly like Oliver. It was a constant agreeable shock, Mary could never get over it, and never fail to be aware of it. It gave her a sort of all-round right in Peter Turton, the right to know all about him, and to want him to beat all the others at everything, hands down. It was not the least like being with the boys or with other men. But it grievously annoyed the boys.

"Mrs. Mirrilies is as nice as they make 'em, of course," said Hallowes one day, as he and Heron were coming back from ski-ing, "but to be as proud as Punch when that fellow beats us!"

"But she said nothing—She——"

"I see it in her eyes. Being like Mirrilies is all very well of course——"

"That does make a difference."

"Evidently. I wonder how Mirrilies would like his double always at her heels."

"He's not," said Heron in his fair way, "any more

than we are. He knows his place all right, and plays the game."

"I don't say he doesn't, or that he isn't a good fellow all round. He is: about the best here, but I wish he'd move on."

"So do I, but he won't."

"Not he. They'll all sit tight. Didn't strike me she'd bother about popularity."

"She doesn't. She just takes it."

"And leaves the bothering to other people. If she won't look out for herself someone else must take over the job, that's all."

Heron suppressed a sigh. He was beginning to realize, in his stolid sensible way, that no one can look after a woman but herself, and that Mrs. Mirrilies, although she was nicer than ever, had somehow slipped out of their hands. She was out for something they hadn't to give.

It was like seeing something you liked most awfully and were as sure of as you were of yourself receding from your grasp.

* . * * * *

That evening after dinner a little elderly Bishop with the thinnest of thin legs, and a hesitating manner, sat down beside Peter Turton and began diffidently to ask for information.

His eyes were set in a network of fine lines, and must have looked out for long years into great distances.

"And without finding it, whatever it was, poor old chap," thought Peter Turton, after a sharp look at him.

"What's he doing here I'd like to know?"

He turned kindly from watching Mrs. Mirrilies to answer the simple inquiries, and was amused to find that the searching eyes had fetched up sharp, and were fixed also on Mary.

"That young lady," said the Bishop gently, adjusting his glasses, "seems to be intelligently interested in everybody, and to have a wide circle of acquaintances. She is very young.—One wonders.—Everything emphasizes a

changed world," he said presently. " Years ago, when you and that young lady were children, I came out to Switzerland with an old friend and two young ones. One of these was intelligent also, and with a fine sense of humour. She also interested herself in people, but under protest as it were,—almost furtively, being scrupulously careful to evade her chaperon's eye. She was the best of women, this lady, with an unbending back, and a chestnut front, I think they called it."

" They are of as many colours now as Joseph's coat," said Peter; " and they have a French name for them."

" Ah ! Even these contrivances then keep pace with the age and make me older. Now they wear them openly, I have no doubt, no longer under the rose, like the chestnut fronts. The early Victorian lady had a profound belief in the singleness of eye of her generation. Her granddaughter defies it ; and to the best of her powers, pleases it. Well ! Perhaps it is better not to make a guilty secret of these things, but it is somewhat startling. Just before I left London I saw a young creature putting powder on her nose upon the top of an omnibus. I must confess that I was sorry."

" I should have been sorry also that the nose should need whitewashing ! "

" Oh ! " said the Bishop. " Oh ! " and returned to Mary. " I think I am right in concluding that the young lady over there has never, in all her happy life, been quelled by the eyes of a chaperon." He looked inquiringly at Turton.

" I should think your surmise is quite correct."

" Ah ! "—he still gazed pensively at Mary. " She goes straight to her point,—I venture to believe,—and gets what she wants."

" I wonder if she does ? " said Oliver's double pensive in his turn. " At any rate, I'll bet my bottom dollar that she doesn't know what she wants yet."

He broke off with a laugh, and wondered what on earth it was that made him tell the old fellow his thoughts like

this. As a rule he was a pretty good hand at keeping them to himself.

"Ah!" said the old Bishop gently. "You also are interested in her."

"Like a good many others! Mrs. Mirrilies isn't often alone."

"No,—happy woman!" he said fervently. Then seeing a slightly amused inquiry in the other man's face, he added quickly, "I've known too much of loneliness ever to wish to see anyone,—especially if she's young,—much alone. Loneliness I have never found to be good for the human soul."

His kind simple eyes rested again upon Mrs. Mirrilies. Turton had been noticing him for a day or so wandering round in a near-sighted way, probably making up his mind to speak to someone, and since Mrs. Mirrilies was otherwise engaged he was quite ready to listen to him.

"You've been abroad, I think," said Peter.

"Yes, I've been in Central Africa for thirty years."

"It's a long time. You'll be glad to be back in England."

"I am, very glad, but England reminds me that I've been away too long."

"Oh! That's only an insular habit of hers, and means nothing; she does it if you've only been away two years. You'll find her less changed than you think, after a bit. She's too chock-full of impregnable prejudices ever to get much of a move on her."

Suddenly Mrs. Mirrilies moved out of the group, and turned to go down the room.

"I believe you'd like to know Mrs. Mirrilies," said Peter, with one eye on the Bishop, and the other on himself. The Bishop looked embarrassed, but his eyes shone.

"I do not wish to presume," he murmured, "but indeed I should."

Peter Turton caught up Mrs. Mirrilies without more ado, and was already explaining the situation, before the bewildered Bishop had begun even to realize his part in it. Directly he did, he stood up, took a few steps, then paused

irresolutely. He had indeed been too long away, and felt giddy in the novelty of a brand-new crisis.

"Oh!" said Mary, with a rapid glance, "he ought to be in the wilderness eating locusts in a leathern girdle. I'll go to him."

Mary was seldom bored now. It was one of her growing charms. She helped the returned exile through the initial difficulties. Civilization seemed to chafe tender places in the sensitive being of the man, and to be always putting him to shame. He was more sensitive to his shortcomings than anyone Mary had yet encountered, and less like a Bishop of the Church Militant. This note of novelty arrested all her attention, and naturally she did her best for him. Not only did she restore him to comparative calm, but in reply to an amused challenge in Peter Turton's eyes, she took him seriously in hand, and simply jockeyed him into revealing something of what was in him.

She won him into forgetting his own insignificance in the abashing face of modern civilization and manœuvred out of him stories of his wild Diocese, until the face of the little frail man, withered and dried before his time, arrested at last the thoughtful attention of the distinguished-sinner group. For his face looked as it had looked to the savages still with man-eating tendencies, for whose souls he had striven for thirty terrible years. He looked as all men look who have led forlorn hopes, and he sent a thrill through the sentient group, who having sinned and suffered can feel, and who always know a big thing when they see it.

Mary was quite proud of her Bishop, and looked triumphantly at Peter who had dared to be amused, and in that second his shyness fell again upon the old Bishop, and he got up hurriedly.

"I believe I've been monopolizing you," he said. "Do forgive me. And,—we'll meet again,—shall we not?"

"Of course we'll meet, dozens of times. And I've got friends in the Hotel lower down you must meet, and a little son you'll probably meet too often."

"Ah! A little son too! I am very glad: I haven't spoken—not really spoken—to a white child for nearly

thirty years. My visits home have been always very full of,—of preoccupations."

"Mrs. Mirrilies," inquired Peter Turton, "what made you deliberately effect that transformation? Was it to please yourself or the Bishop?—or just to show me for my irreverence?"

"One always starts everything to please oneself. After that it was partly just to show you! and partly,—oh! well, just to show a man! I felt sure there was one in that little body."

"Are you always successful in finding and revealing men?"

Mary paused, hesitated and blushed.

"No, I'm not," she said, laughing. "Anything but that. My only successes are with Bishops, and boys."

She lowered her eyes. He was so uncomfortably like Oliver. It seemed as though it were to Oliver she was confessing her failure, and there, like Oliver also, he sat mute and unsuspecting beside her.

"I'm going to have a tea-party to-morrow on my covered verandah," she said quickly. "It's so sun-soaked that even a broken-down old Bishop won't catch cold, and I'll ask my old dears, and the boys, and you if you like to come. And Oliver shall choose the cakes."

"Having proved your powers to such excellent purpose on Bishops and boys,—" said Peter presently, "your guardian angels are excellent fellows, when they permit themselves to relax,—why not try them on unearthing the hidden treasure of the adult?"

"And perhaps awake sleeping dogs. The adult can look out for himself, and wake up his own dogs. That's his affair. He wakes them up at his own peril. And he can muzzle them himself. You can't muzzle other people's dogs for them. You don't know them, and you might get bitten."

"All adventurers must take risks."

"I'm not an adventurer!"

He laughed. "Oh! Aren't you?"

"It's the wrong word.—You have no right——"

"Oh, yes. I have the right of Universal Brotherhood. Everyone who goes fooling round life with all the wits he has about him,—outside his own parish, or even within its bounds, is an adventurer. After all life is like the ocean,—a drop contains the whole of it. You can't even paddle in life, without the risk of striking adventures that may make a man or a mouse of you. There's nothing poor or depleted in that amazing element.—Do you still object to the word? It's a fine old word and made England. Only we were honester once, and called ourselves Buccaneers. There's a magic in that word for me. We all want the unknown for its own sake first, and foremost, but afterwards for what it has to give us,—unexplored and unmortgaged territory with hidden treasure in the caves."

"But,—but there may be other things in the caves besides hidden treasure—"

"Well, we're ready for dragons, it's part of the fun, and as for sleeping dogs,—the sooner you wake them and find out what they're made of the better. Letting them sleep on won't alter their evil tendencies, it only shows them you're afraid of them. Very likely they've only turned nasty from being too long on the chain; and unless he's hopeless, you can nearly always train or thrash a dog into decent behaviour. I've turned many a hopeless outcast, into an honest dog. If you can't do that,—well, get rid of him! Anyway if you start being afraid of any dog, asleep or awake, from that moment he's top dog, and you're bottom—and don't you think it's very much the same thing with life?"

"I don't know," said Mary.

"Neither do I. But I mean to assume that it is for the sake of argument."

By this time Peter Turton's eyes were the eyes of the dreamer, and saw more things than Mary.

"The minute you begin to distrust dog or life, you get distrust thrown back in your face. You've lost your superiority. The only thing you can do with a thing as huge as life,—as much your master if you give in to it, is to trust it. If you do, it will never betray you."

Mary flushed. He was horribly like Oliver. She knew now that Oliver had thought all this, and had never said it. She had found out very early in the day, in some secret place of his heart, that Oliver had to be protected from many of his moods, and she had always protected him.

In those early days, to have let even one thought of Oliver hurt her, would have seemed almost like blasphemy to all women, and an injury beyond redemption to Oliver, and in protecting herself, she had protected him. Now she knew that she had only silenced him. She wondered suddenly just how much Oliver had withheld, and her heart seemed to shrivel into a little hard ball and to hurt her.

She wanted to go away and be alone with Oliver the Less, and to get her heart soft again. But Oliver was too young for such things, and this man would certainly understand all that was baffling and disturbing, just as Oliver the Greater would, and he was as safe and sure.

All the growing loneliness of the past months seemed to have accumulated, and to be pressing down upon her. She felt so helpless that even to be near some strong thing was an immense help. A strength like Oliver's that had never yielded and would never yield was what she wanted, and it was there, ready to her hand.

"The sleeping dogs inside people don't yield so easily to treatment, do they?" she asked.

"How can they when we're in a blue funk of them all the time? It's sheer want of pluck and an inherited distrust of humanity. If dogs had been suspected and hated by man from the beginning, in the way he's suspected and hated his fellow man, they'd never have dropped the wolf at all, and have torn the better part of human infancy limb from limb. The wonder is that we're as good as we are the way we've been sworn at, and convicted of sin by priest and prophet. According to them, our own little messes are nothing to the colossal messes of the Creator. If all of us would give every sleeping dog we strike the benefit of the doubt, and let him wake up, and show his paces before we judge him hopeless, we'd all be much better

friends, and just as moral as we are now ; it's not much to boast of,—but we can always hope for the best."

" It must be rather nice and easy living among horses and dogs," she said wistfully.

" Easy ! Good Lord, no ! You have to keep your eyes skinned. But it's never dull."

Her face amused and touched him. She was so young and so undeveloped. She took things so seriously. It was unpleasant to think of brutal suffering in regard to so gentle and virginal a woman,—and yet it would come, and when it came, it *would* be brutal. He would like to have spared her,—and yet she was too good to be spared.—Besides, it was Mirrilies' business after all, and not his.

" I'm sure there's dancing going on somewhere," he said suddenly. " Shall we go and find out ? How many dances will you give me ? "

" Two. The rest are promised."

" It's a short allowance. However, half a loaf——"

* * * * *

For the first time in her life Mary didn't want to dance. Her thoughts were darting, as swift as arrows, from Oliver to his double. They were too bewildered even to be danced into shape, as she had done with many another disturbing problem. With Mary dancing was an extraordinarily vivid living process. The only time when the likeness between her and Oliver the Less was striking was when she danced or skated. Mary was as primitive and ethereal as the sun upon the quiet mountains when she moved rhythmically. And now Peter Turton felt it in every fibre, and it silenced him.

It didn't silence her guardians, however. As soon as they got hold of Mrs. Mirrilies they were voluble in their differing degrees, upon Peter. He had given a peculiarly objectionable alien a game of billiards and then vanished, leaving the other fellow cock of the walk, and neither of them up to much so far as French billiards were concerned. When put to it, of course, Hallowes had to wire in and win.

There was nothing else to do.—But to evaporate like that, and leave the thing to chance!

"I'd like to have seen that game," said Mary appreciatively.

"You were probably much more agreeably employed," said Hallowes rigidly.

"I wonder if I was," said Mary innocently. "If I had known that Mr. Turton had deserted his country in his country's need, I shouldn't have been. Still it gave *you* your opportunity." Her eyes were dancing lightly, in spite of her apparent interest.

Hallowes glowered. Mrs. Mirrilies recollected herself.

"I notice you never do your uttermost best until the stimulus is big enough,—or of a violent order. That's bad in an everyday world."

"All one wants to do any job," said Hallowes gloomily, "is a fellow a bit of a bigger fool than yourself—who thinks he can beat you."

"It's a help certainly, but I find the bigger fools so scarce," sighed Mary. "Heron scores off both of us, he'll put the job through even without the fool."

Hallowes felt sure her mind was far away, he'd like very much to have known what she and the other chap were talking about. Mary hated to see discomfort ravaging her boys unless absolutely essential to their development so she changed the subject.

"I'm going to have a tea-party to-morrow. You, of course—and the others—and a Bishop I've just discovered."

"Oh! the old chap with big eyes that look scared? I never saw a Bishop look like that before," said Hallowes who had suffered from Bishops in his own family.

"That's why I asked him. He's a new variety. But it's only civilization that scares him. He's gone through more grisly dangers than many adventurers by profession and never turned a hair."

"Do you think he can turn a soul?" inquired Hallowes, sceptical from too close a contact with ecclesiasticism.

"I don't know," said Mary, "but he's touched many a heart, and perhaps it's the same thing."

"He'll be something new at the tea-parties," said Hallowes, still slightly depressed.

"So was Lasotovitsch once, and now we couldn't do without him."

"Lasotovitsch gave in to treatment in no time," said Hallowes with insular insolence. "You'd hardly know him from an Englishman now."

"Except when his genius outstrips his affection, and he talks philosophy like an angel," said Mary.

"Just now," said Hallowes, ignoring her remark, "I saw the old Bishop dusting snow off a squalling American."

"Oh!" said Heron hopefully. "He'll be useful hustling Oliver if Fräulein's mother keeps on being ill."

"Oliver scores all round and he'll be spoilt all round," said his mother anxiously.

"Oh, we'll see to that," said Hallowes easily.

"Set a thief to catch a thief!"

"I daresay if I'd had someone to kick me at the right moment I might be a credit to my parents now."

"You might," said Mary. "It's hard to say. But not having had, you can't judge how much kicks hurt little soft bodies,—so just don't kick too hard."

"Oliver hasn't complained?" inquired the boys in a breath.

"Oliver complain of either of you! Oliver's a soldier, and if his commanding officers kicked him black and blue he'd not even mention the matter to me."

"You ought to have a dozen sons, Mrs. Mirrilies," said Hallowes, forgetting his discretion in his zeal.

"I wonder," said Mary suavely, but she blushed pink. And like a foolish woman she kept on wondering,—and like a casuistical one, she persuaded herself that the babies who might have been could never be equal to the one who was, and between the two vain wonderings she had a rank bad night.

CHAPTER XIX

"THE Bishop ought to feel flattered," said Hallowes dubiously, as he watched Mrs. Mirrilles arranging flowers. It was of Peter Turton Hallowes was thinking, and not of the Bishop. It was Mr. Turton's first tea-party also.

"These flowers aren't for the Bishop altogether," said Mary, with her head on one side to get the effect.

"Oh!"

"I feel somehow that something's going to happen that calls for flowers at prohibitive prices."

"The only things that happen to people that could call for flowers as dear as these," said Hallowes thoughtfully, "are death and matrimony. No one is out for death just now—and none of the lot of us is likely to take to matrimony. It must be Turton who's got to provide the unexpected."

"It's not Mr. Turton," said Mary, reflecting upon a saffron carnation. "I shouldn't buy flowers, at a franc a head, for any unexpected Mr. Turton could give us. My flowers are for a much milder sort of unexpected."

"Turton seems very solid and usual," said Hallowes. "I shouldn't have thought him capable of startling surprises."

"You never can tell. And you're not as logical, Jim, as you'd wish us to believe. It's the way of surprises to surprise you."

"Well, yes. After all any fool can surprise you if he puts his mind to it."

"Oh, no, he can't. A fool never excites any emotion

in you but pity, if you're kind, and a desire to slay him if you're not. Besides our tea-parties have nothing to do with fools," said Mary good-humouredly. "And if the flowers aren't for the Bishop that bread and butter is, Harry; so you just cut it beautifully."

Hallowes glanced at the patient toiler in the rear.

"Trust Harry to do his job, especially if it's the one no one else wants to tackle."

"That's just the difference between you," said Mary. "One can always bet on Harry. One can only hope for you."

"One for you, Jim!" said Heron.

"And expect the impossible," pursued Mary calmly. "It's a great deal, Jim. It may equal our absolute certainty of Harry in the end. In the meantime, those cups are all askew."

"Bother the cups!—I was wondering how soon you'll forget either how to bet on Harry, or to hope for me."

"So that's your idea of friendship, is it? It's not mine or Oliver's. We never forget our friends."

"They may get chucked in amongst such a crowd of new ones that they all look pretty much the same."

"You admit your ability then to get lost in any crowd. If I'd said that you'd both have been down on me like a load of bricks.—And—You're at your old game, Jim. Doing all the talk while we do all the work. If your talk amused us, I shouldn't mind. It's your contribution to the show, but when it comes to airing a grievance that doesn't exist!"

"I've removed the dust of ages from seven cups and set them out as neat as wax. What more do you want? Making work is the pastime of the idle. By the way, don't you think a fellow—to let out a proper surprise, you know, wants what those others call temperament? Shouldn't have suspected Turton of that sort of thing myself."

"Hard to say. With us temperaments are a bit suspect, don't you think?—like—er—sleeping dogs? Englishmen have a way of keeping their temperament on

the chain, till it's wanted. All the other peoples let it loose to practice all its antics in the face of the public. I shouldn't be surprised if Mr. Turton had quite a promising temperament somewhere about him. You find out everything, Jim. Find out that, and let us know."

This was subterfuge. It was pretty plain that Turton had been making his innings the night before, and that Mrs. Mirrilies was considerably too young for the place! Jim looked out dejectedly at the innocent snow.

Harry behind his bread and butter was also pensive.

Of course, in a way, it had always been hopeless from the beginning, but to have a fellow at least ten years older coming between them and their claims and Mrs. Mirrilies actually repeating his bally rot! There was certainly a note not hers in the conversation. The holidays they had been living for weeks were as disappointing as everything else in life.

Mary suddenly conscious of wounding, was anxious to heal.

"I say," she said. "Everything's ready and we've a full hour to spare. Let us go skating, and collect Oliver and the dears."

"And watch that fellow's new steps," reflected Hallowes morosely. "He has a dozen a day. To be as vain an ass as that at his age!"

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Naturally Oliver was at the heels of Peter, and clamoured for his mother to join him and clap the victor.

"Oh, Jim," said Oliver under his breath, "he's beaten you and Harry, an' I'd be all sorry only he's just exactly like my real Dad, and my Dad must beat everyone."

"But since he's not your Dad, Oliver, I'm going to beat him in the end see if I don't."

Oliver's divided mind looked out of his big eyes.

"Then you'll be like my Dad too," he said slowly. "For he beats everyone in the end. Oh, Jim!" cried the turn-coat, "be quick, and do it before tea."

"You probably will," said Mary with a chuckle, "since

it's impossible. Come, Oliver, we'll hobble in the wake and see the fight."

Jim said nothing, but he beat Turton. The stimulus was sufficiently violent. It was a notable contest, and vanquished and victor went in together to Mary's tea like brothers, until woman the severing sword again slipped between.

"And my real Dad he'll beat you all," whispered Oliver to his two oldest friends.

"Does your imitation one know of this extraordinary likeness?" inquired Jim.

"No," said Oliver almost inaudibly. "Big mans mustn't get too proud. It's my own secret and Mummy's, an' yours now. He's too new yet," said the temporizer.

Mary knew neither the name of the Bishop, nor that of his Diocese, and didn't trouble to ask. It was the man who mattered, and since he had started at cockcrow for a mountain walk neither Oliver nor his aunts had yet made his acquaintance.

Miss Gaunt sighed as she put on her clothes absently, and wondered if Mary's Bishop might not perhaps know hers, and above all know his wife. There could be no two opinions about Robert, but she had been hankering for years for some authentic information in regard to his wife.

She looked pensive and depressed as she came in. Meditations upon her saintly supplanter had very effectively wrung her withers.

The power to be hurt badly at any age is one of the penalties for keeping too acutely in touch with life. Indifference, or a gentle misunderstanding of life scores less lines.

Cousin Ella looked years younger than her contemporary as they arrived together, but it was Miss Gaunt to whom Oliver ran first, and the boys turned, and quite soon she was almost her happy self again.

But for some inscrutable reason Mary was mortified at her blatant plainness, and she turned in her perturbation to the ever-ready Jim.

"A pretty old woman as good as Cousin Ella has no

business to make an ugly one as ugly as that," she said resentfully.

"But who cares with such an old brick?" said Jim easily. "Still——"

Plainly it was a matter of moment to Mrs. Mirrilies.

The interest of Jim was secured.

"Take off her hat," he said, focussing his eyes like an artist. "She has her wrong one on to-day. Put her in the shade, and let her talk, and she'll be as right as rain."

"Oh, Jim, you always suggest the right thing. What I should do without you both I can't imagine."

And then having set out Miss Gaunt to the best advantage, Mary let her thoughts wander off to Peter Turton. It was difficult to keep them away now, and so far it was an innocent enough preoccupation and she thought sometimes that it kept a little of the loneliness at bay. She seemed to be less haunted by it than she had been. But sometimes again it made the pain and the loneliness almost greater than she could bear.

The problem was getting more complicated, the issue more bewildering. What would happen to her and to Oliver? What was to be the end of it? In none of his letters did Oliver now ever speak of his return, or of their reunion. She rushed through each letter as it came, hoping for a word, a hint, a hope, but never a one. The letters were full of quiet affection, care, solicitude, Oliver kept her informed of all the details of his life, and of the life of the Station, his one and only omission being the full significance of Barbara in his recovery. A great gulf was widening between them, and Oliver was letting it widen. He threw out no suggestion for any bridge across the yawning gulf.

Those pleasant thoughtful letters of his turned her heart to ice, a great fear and a great shrinking were taking fast hold of Mary. Her growing feeling of helplessness shocked and disturbed her. She did not know to whom to turn in her strange need. It had nothing to do with women and boys, or with a little child. It was a

relief to turn, even partially,—the outermost surface of her, to a strong man, who had that within him which made him kin with the strongest strength, that alone can unlock the closed doors that baffle women.

What she hoped for from Peter Turton, Mary did not know, but she hoped for something. And at any rate it would be strong. It would be life itself. Many of her other friends, for purposes of their own had set up an artificial barrier between themselves and life. Her stately friends, with a fine proud, whimsical, smile had decided to be done with life. Her spartan friends drew their skirts slightly apart from it, lest they should come in contact with any foreign substance. But neither of these divisions had anything to do with Oliver.

The brilliant adult creatures who, having drunk too deep of life, had let it pass on without them,—or those who, not having drunk deep enough, must for ever be thirsty.

It was in Oliver, or in his double, that one must look for the fullness and the completion of life.

The want of development Mary had always in her secret soul belauded as purity was becoming more and more unsatisfying, and unsatisfactory. So much that she had cherished seemed to be grounded upon entirely wrong premises, and to need revision.

And now it often struck her like a blow that Oliver himself didn't know her any more than she knew herself, or than she knew Oliver. And if she didn't know herself or Oliver, she couldn't possibly know what he wanted, much less give it to him.

For all she knew, or Oliver knew, she might already have everything to give that Oliver could possibly want—that any man could possibly want.

Perhaps in some things Oliver was right, after all, and she was wrong. It was horrid to think it, but perhaps, after all, he was. Perhaps men know better than women, for all their miserable mistakes, for all the grief they have heaped upon women, for all the wild desire of women to change men.

The women old enough to be her mother, who loved her like a mother, the boys who adored her as boys do, the child who was the heart of her heart, were as helpless in her great need as though she were a friendless, childless creature without a home. And there was a continent between her and Oliver!

The only one to whom she *could* turn, who could understand her and might help her, was a man she had known but a little week or so.

She pulled herself back from vain speculation to welcome the Bishop.

Cousin Ella glanced with shy benediction at the holy man. Miss Gaunt pushed her chair back with a small spasmodic screech. The Bishop's spectacled eyes passed lightly but with great courtesy over both ladies to dwell with quiet joy upon Oliver, who was at once attracted by his legs. He went with the child to the window, his eyes followed his every movement.

"He hasn't spoken properly to a white child for thirty years," explained Mary.

Tears of sentiment sprang to the ready eyes of Cousin Ella. Miss Gaunt grunted.

"Have you," said Oliver, pausing for another look, "not chillens? You're too old a Bishop for chillens, but grand-chillens."

"No," said the Bishop. "I had a child once—rather like you."

"But where is he?"

"He died—oh! years ago. Otherwise you might be playing with my grandchildren."

Miss Gaunt replied at last to Mary's third invitation to come to the table, and it was then that the Bishop turned with quite a youthful jump, stared, and made for her.

"It surely isn't,—er,—Miss Gaunt?"

"It surely is," said Miss Gaunt in her gruffest voice, "and she's got a better memory than you. I knew you at once."

"I,—I was looking at the child."

"I didn't know you ever had a child," she said in a curious low voice.

"Ah, you never heard? He died out there. We were in a better Station; we thought it quite safe, but it was a mistake."

"Ah!—Come and speak to Ella,—Bishop."

He looked at her quickly. He wished that she had called him Robert. He wondered if by any chance she could have forgotten his name.

With the fortitude of all the virgins in creation Ella was suppressing her tears. To permit any symptom of untoward agitation to betray itself upon so delicate an occasion would have been the death of Cousin Ella.

"This is indeed a pleasure," she said, rising with old-fashioned grace. "When my niece asked us to meet you we little expected to meet almost our oldest friend. We made our first acquaintance with Switzerland together,—and now we make,—perhaps our last."

"I owed you my first visit. Your aunt most kindly gave me a seat in her carriage that first time."

"But what should we have done without you?" said Cousin Ella, blushing like a rose, so well did she remember the poverty of the young curate. "You saved our lives in that mountain accident, and—and—nearly lost yours; and you spoke French and German so well, whilst we could hardly speak a word. You were much too young at the time to teach, my dear," she said, turning to Miss Gaunt; "and besides I was too stupid to learn. And oh, Julia, just think if we hadn't had the Bishop with us that awful night!"

As though Julia needed reminding! Robert had been a hero that night, and he had looked one. Thirty barren years seemed to weigh down upon her, and to crush her into silence. Nothing would ever induce her to believe that Robert's wife ever knew him as she knew him that night, when for the first and last time in her life, she had looked upon the face of a hero, and a hero of such sound quality, as not to be put off even by an ugly face.

"I do hope," she thought rapidly "that his wife is

pretty and impossible. I fear she is not. One has heard rumours of her powers of organization. Perhaps she's a manager. Robert couldn't stand a manager."

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She had left him to Ella, and was now helping Mary.

"What do you think of the luging and ski-ing young ladies, so different from us?" she asked, turning abruptly.

"With a great likeness," he said, with a glance at her, "you, I believe, would also have liked to ski and luge, had such pastimes been then in vogue. As to thinking, one doesn't think when one comes back,—one wonders or tries to keep out of the way of the sportswomen, or, in case of disaster, to offer them one's very clumsy services. I tried to-day, not very successfully, to assist a lady who had fallen on her back and appeared to be immovably embedded in the snow."

"Was she incredibly solid," inquired Miss Gaunt, "and dressed like a knitted doll? And did she scold you severely when you rescued her?"

"I don't know about the knitted doll, but she was somewhat heavy, and she did scold me at some length."

"It's the Blue One," said Oliver ecstatically. "Oh, Mr. Bishop, why didn't you leave her, an' perhaps more snow'd come, and no one'd ever find her again?"

"Such a course had, no doubt, its advantages, little one, but if you see a lady helpless on her back, your first duty is to set her on her feet."

"You needn't *look*," sighed Oliver.

"You had to, Oliver. It was an imposing spectacle. It couldn't escape observation."

"Didn't no one else see her?"

"Yes, but they had probably already suffered from her, whereas I had not."

"Oh, you'll know her the next time, dear Mr. Bishop," wheedled Oliver.

"Bishops have consciences, Oliver," said Miss Gaunt. "It will make no difference."

"One never knows oneself, of course," said the Bishop

pensively ; " but I hope my conscience is more open to reason now than it was thirty years ago."

" If it's not," said Mary, " you must break it in at once. Oliver's Blue One is always the centre of some catastrophe, and she always blames the Hotel, or the climate, or the man reckless enough to extricate her."

" I think these ladies must remember her prototype, who fainted, and required brandy, and scolded also when restored. My old world seems all to be coming back," he said gently.

" In all essentials," said Miss Gaunt, " the world is pretty much as you left it. We've got older, that's all, perhaps wiser,—it's hard to say. Have one of these cakes you used to like."

" No better than I do now," he said gratefully. " We all ate them together the day of our arrival ; and although youth may go, and friendship, alas ! may die, I hope that the flavour of such cakes, and all it stands for, may be immortal."

" Oh ! " said Oliver, with a brand new hope. " Is bishops greedy too ? "

" They have, I believe, a capacity for every vice," said the Bishop, laughing ; " but as a rule the years have robbed them of the pleasant vice of greediness. Having lived for thirty-five years on tinned food, Oliver, must be my excuse."

" 'Scuses," said Oliver, recalling an axiom, " is for cowards."

" Well, then, I have no excuse. I'm honestly glad to feel greedy again after all these years of leanness."

" Oh ! " said Oliver, and fortified by ecclesiastical sanction, he devoured cakes in the shadow of Miss Gaunt at a rate hitherto unprecedented.

Mary was talking to Peter Turton, so it was Miss Gaunt in the end who descended upon him.

" Oliver," she counselled, " a bishop may be greedy and get off scot-free. Thirty-five years of tinned meat would break in any stomach to anything ; but it's another story with you. You'll be howling with stomach-ache,

and upsetting everyone in five minutes, and I can tell you the boys won't thank you for spoiling their tea. And think of the powder you'll have to swallow."

"Have you a stomach-ache, Aunt? Your face is red,—an' are you cryin'?"

"Crying? Rather not, and no wonder my face is red pouncing down on you. Here! Give me that plate."

"I like greedy bishops," said Oliver resentfully, his eyes on the plate.

"Perhaps," said Miss Gaunt, "they never get greedy until the age for stomach-aches is past."

"I wish I was a old bishop, then."

"Oh, Oliver, I'm glad you're not!" she said.

Oliver was quite sure that her face got redder, and this time it *was* real tears. This was interesting. Oliver stared with all his eyes.

"But, Aunt——" She turned sharp round, and Oliver forgot the tears, and was only sorry for the cakes.

When Miss Gaunt returned to the group Peter Turton had joined it. Cousin Ella was gazing with beaming admiration at the Bishop, and the Bishop was patiently awaiting his opportunity.

"I bring back his lost youth for him like the cakes," thought Miss Gaunt.

"Do you remember," he said, while she was in the very act of sitting down,—and with that he broke into a flood of remembrances, clear, concise, vivid.

"He's forgotten nothing except to mention his wife," thought Miss Gaunt. "I wish he'd get it over and clear the ground, then I could take my proper place and keep it,—now I don't know where I am."

But the Bishop thought of nothing but his ineffable youth, and the woman he had loved then, and for ever. The inevitable interruption of a wife seemed to fade into some far kind of distance, where all her small insufferable virtues lay softly gathered together under a neat mound all strewn with little prim buttony flowers. Alice had had no faults to soften the inexhaustible vigour of her virtues.

Still, he was a man of sense and experience, and a present with Mary Mirrilles in it could not fail to interest him. He had been a good deal impressed by Peter Turton, and presently he began to ask for a little information in regard to the two.

"She is very young and sweet and clever," he said.

"Why is she not with her husband?"

"The usual causes—climate, *et cetera*."

"Ah! The usual tragic choice. But in her case? She is very young and inexperienced."

"She was in India for some years."

He paused with another diffident glance. "Still—"

"She has never been in love if that's what you mean," said Miss Gaunt bluntly.

"Oh!" he looked startled.

"Oh! Don't be under any misapprehension. Mary is extremely fond of her husband, and the best of wives."

"Yes. I understand."

"I just wonder if you do," she thought grimly.

"Being extremely fond of one's husband is an excellent thing in its way," he said at last, "but I don't think it's good enough for that young lady. She is of an eager and inquiring mind, I take it, and will want all things in time. Do you know Captain Mirrilles?"

"Yes. Well. I'm not sure that he's not too good even for Mary, and he's the image of that man there."

"Dear me! Dear me!—and—and to see him daily?" said he to himself.

"I have had two long walks with Mr. Turton," he went on. "He interests me in quite an unusual way."

"He interests Mary also in quite an unusual way," she said uncompromisingly. "He's a good fellow all round, and a man to his toes."

"Well, yes," admitted the other, who knew just how much that fact added to the difficulties of things in general.

"It's curious that so clever and eager a woman should know so little of men."

"How on earth can you know anything at all about

them until you're in love with one of them?" she blurted out, then remembering herself, she blushed brick red.

"You're quite right," he said gently, with lowered eyes. "Love is the only sure guide to anything. You and her other friends will be glad when Mrs. Mirrilies has fallen in love with her husband."

"It will save us, at any rate, from the haunting obsession of the spinster to be always thrusting her finger into some married pie. In this matter of marriage nothing will persuade the unmated female that she doesn't know a precious deal more about the game than the players."

"Ah! It's only the expert in the game who can judge it," he said, looking quietly down at his delicate withered hands.

"What's that apropos of, I'd like to know? I wish to goodness he'd mention her and get her over." She pushed back her chair with another plaintive screech, and stood up to collect Ella, and her wits.

"I suppose Mary has told the boys about Robert," she thought. "I see it in their eyes. One tells them everything somehow.—Ah! It's sad to be old. To have nothing more to give,—and to amuse the young a little!—I think I could cry for ever."

CHAPTER XX

"I SHALL have to clear now, I suppose," said Peter Turton. "I see the guardian angels collecting eyes."

"No," said Mary, with a rapid glance. "They're only exchanging impressions."

"Now there's a firm friendship for you. Even a woman can't upset it."

"Good gracious! A woman of my age, and hopeless from the start, to come between my boys!"

"She might. I quarrelled with my best friend over my crammer's daughter. She was ten years my senior. The breach might have been permanent, if she hadn't eloped with the fool of the bunch, shortly afterwards."

"Oh, well, a woman like that!"

"The unexpected as usual. She was a B.A. and had taken honours in every subject. She had fine aquiline features, and wore glasses. Nothing light and frivolous about Miss Hermione Sprowle. She had experience too. She was in no sort of way, taken unawares. She had affected in much the same way she did me and Lang, a rapid succession of raw recruits for over a period of eight years. She had a good heart, too, and got Lang through his exams, which it was quite certain no one else could have done. He's doing well now as a country parson."

"But—what induced her?"

"What induces anyone to kick over the traces at a moment's notice? She had been adamant—Diana on the hill-top, a star in the frosty Heavens for eight stricken

years. That's why our hearts became flames of fire for her sake, and we lost our appetites, and suddenly one day the call came, and she obeyed it."

"Well, if that's all the good of a University education."

"No education counts for anything when one is caught in the whirl of some eternal force."

"But this is rather awful. According to you, anyone is liable to be caught up at any moment by some eternal force on the prowl."

"Well, yes,—unless one is properly protected."

"But what properly protects you?"

"The eternal force itself I suppose. Being properly in love with God or man."

"Oh, dear me! Then do discipline, and self-control, and common-sense, go for nothing?"

"They do in theory, they don't as a rule in action."

"You're very depressing, and I ought to be attending to my guests."

"You're ably represented. Look at Hallowes!"

"But one doesn't exactly care to have one's boys being an example to one."

"Your discomfort in the matter is probably deserved. The griefs of women are our fault, as a rule, but her little discomforts are her own, don't you think?"

"I don't know. I don't think I know anything of women, or of men either," said Mary, rising.

"Do you think it particularly matters?" he asked, with a laugh.

"For a woman you mean?"

"A man of my age and experience who knew nothing of human beings you'd call a fool."

"What's folly in a man may be wisdom in a woman."

"Or a 'mush of concession.'"

"There's a lot of soft comfort in a 'mush of concession.' It's better anyway than earthquakes."

"Do you know anything of earthquakes?" she said, turning to him sharply.

"I was once the victim of one, and I didn't find my

University education of the slightest use in it. It's left me with a constitutional distrust of earthquakes and education."

"And yet you want all the sleeping dogs in creation to be let loose. They may be just as bad as earthquakes."

"But you can train and domesticate dogs, and you can't earthquakes."

"They may disclose hidden treasure too."

"They may, and Hell fires. You never know."

"You're not the least consistent."

"If I were, I'd cut my throat. Consistency in the sort of world we're dumped down in would spell despair."

"It could be such a heavenly world," said Mary restively. "There oughtn't to be any despair in it."

"Perhaps there's not."

"But the waiting to find out," she said quickly.

"You can't wait. You've got to get on somehow. Sitting about philosophizing in ruins or 'in melancholy little houses we built to be so gay with,' is gone out. Get a move on you and leave your ruins to time. He's a contractor on a big scale, don't you think, grinding up all the ruins of creation, to provide fresh material to build houses for 'happy people.'"

"But," said Mary, "we're such jerry builders, we just build ruins."

"Yes, we are a firm of jerry-builders, as you say, and make more ruins than the earthquakes of a century. But we can learn our trade at least, and draw from the best designs, and then if we follow pure beauty of line, I don't believe it will lead anyone astray."

Mary's face, in its eager bewilderment, was very beautiful. He watched it long and curiously.

"And keep clear of earthquakes," he said, laughing.

Mary smiled a little vaguely.

"Oh, well, you have a beautiful house built before jerry-builders were invented—'to be gay with,'" she said.

"The boys and Oliver told me about your sketches of it."

"It's beautiful," he said, "and I love every stone of it."

But it didn't come in time. I'll tell you all about it some day."

"Tell me to-night," said Mary. "We can sit out a dance. But I say, you haven't asked me for one."

"You've asked me, so it's all right."

* * * * *

"Me an' the Bishop," announced Oliver, "is goin' for a walk. He'll mind me in the dark and we'll be home soon."

"Oh, please don't let him worry you!" said Mary.

"The Bishop asked me," said Oliver with dignity.

"You're a lucky beggar, Oliver," said Hallowes, "having a Bishop to keep you up beyond your time. All bishops ever did for me was to examine me in arithmetic, and send me to bed before mine."

"Your bishop probably knew his duty while I don't. Oliver must teach me. Come, Oliver, you have a heavy responsibility on your young shoulders. We'll take these ladies home first, and then we'll call all the stars we know by name, and try to remember the others."

"Fräulein's mother fell sick in the very nick of time," said Hallowes.

Oliver wriggled his hand farther into the Bishop's.

"I'm sorry for her mother, an' I like Fräulein, but Bishops is nice."

"That's all right, Oliver," said his mother to the little half doubt in the child's face. "Liking one friend never makes us forget the others."

"Like the new aunts an' the old, an' a new Bishop an' new boys.—I wonder if any of 'em will ever get lost?"

"Never!" said his mother. "People's hearts get bigger and bigger as they go on until at last they can hold the world."

"As right as rain in theory as usual," said Peter Turton as he went down the stairs, "and she loves her child, and I wonder if I'm helping or hindering her by staying on."

She's too good to hinder. And a woman must help herself. At any rate, if everything weren't finished long ago,— I could teach her something she doesn't know, and that's what love is. I wonder if Mirrilies is a fool or if I am?— Whatever we are, she's the one might-have-been for me,— the only one I've struck yet."

CHAPTER XXI

IN her vivid interest in other people,—the insatiable curiosity of the egoist,—Mary could even now often forget herself. There was a certain excitement, moreover, in connection with the old romance that was absorbing.

It was only Peter Turton apparently who made her insist upon herself, and kept it uncomfortably in evidence. Herself and Barbara. It was not only Oliver now who spoke of Barbara. Every letter she got from India seemed to reek of her. Barbara! whom no one had ever before dreamed of mentioning except in connection with some petty misfortune.

Barbara in her new light made the pain of longing for Oliver,—longing to know and understand him—almost unendurable, and at the same time, to know and understand and talk to Peter Turton, imperative. He was the one person she had yet met who could help her,—in what or to what, she did not in the least know. All she knew was that it was to some new understanding of all things, some new yet ancient freedom in which she had until now walked bound.

Peter Turton apparently in some wild way was to serve as a stepping-stone to Oliver!

Mary was as bewildered and foolish as an unproven girl, and she was desperately alone.

Only that Oliver's letters, for all their affection, were more iron and inflexible than ever, Mary would have sent little Oliver home with Cousin Ella and regardless of season, or comment, or common-sense, or of anything else, she would have gone straight off to her husband, gone

humiliated, bewildered, disappointed, and no wiser than she had left him all agog to get at the root of all knowledge.

Much good her education had done her, or her intellect, or her explorations and excavations into the minds of boys! They had given her a dozen different ways of loving, of course, some sorrow, and friends she could never again do without, but Oliver was as far off as ever.

As for German psychologists, she had a vicious conviction that if put in her place with Oliver and Barbara reverberating in their great impersonal wide-open ears, they would feel just as idiotic as she did.

Meanwhile all this play of strange emotion was making Mary more desirable every day to her little world, and more dangerous to a man like Turton, who whether from folly or something better had just brought to a close ten long years of waiting for a worthless woman who had never come.

Now he was at last free and ripe for any disaster.

* * * * *

Mrs. Mirrilies wore some creamy filmy stuff that night and an orange ribbon burnt in and out of her dark hair like a flame. Oliver had made mistakes in his prayers, so overcome was he by admiration.

"When I'm big and me an' you go down togedder to dinner, will you wear it again?" said Oliver, instead of saying, "God bless my dear, dear Daddy," and his Mother had kissed him instead of scolding him, and Oliver had wondered why her face was wet.

The boys wondered, the one with proud, the other with humble despair, if it was for that fellow Turton she tricked herself out like that. For reasons of reprisal, propriety, and retribution they got all the dances they could out of her. She refused everyone else.

Cousin Ella and Miss Gaunt, as neat as wax and fine with old jewellery, slipped into their usual quiet corner looking almost violently agitated. Miss Gaunt as red as a turkey cock, Cousin Ella of that shadowy indefinite pink one finds in eighteenth-century fabrics with a touch

of lilac in it. The ardent hues of Miss Gaunt were due to a robust determination to believe herself the victim of senile decay. Cousin Ella's delicate tints had a purely sentimental origin.

As a rule they came on dance nights to watch Mary, and pay little tiptoe visits to Oliver. But to-night the Bishop had invited them !

And even with this preoccupation they too had time to wonder at Mary.

When the Bishop had gone to make arrangements for refreshments later in the evening, Cousin Ella turned falteringly to the other.

" Mary,—Mary frightens me a little," she murmured.

" She doesn't frighten me then. I'd like to whip her, and send her to bed."

" Dear Julia, don't be harsh. She is very young."

" Young's no word for it ! She's as callow as a gosling. To have married Oliver and borne him a child ought to teach a woman something, or she might just as well wither on as a spinster."

" But, Julia——"

" Oh, Ella ! Think of the glory, and the exultation of bearing a child when you love its father ! *That* to teach a girl nothing except to put a ribbon in her hair, and turn herself into a sorceress,—and it wasn't even her husband and her child who taught her that ! "

" Aren't you hard on Mary, dearest Julia ?—and—isn't,—isn't it all—a little indelicate ? "

" Why should indelicacy always be confounded with plenty in the mind of the woman who's never had enough ? " demanded Miss Gaunt. " There's nothing indelicate in anything but in destitution." In deference to Ella's apprehensive twitter she spoke in a low voice, and smiled valiantly out on the brilliant crowd.

" Being ashamed of your rags and your sores and trying to hide them, being the beggar at the rich man's gate without even the bitter consolation of an ultimate reward in Abraham's bosom, that's the sort of thing that ought to make you blush really. Nothing will ever

persuade me that Heaven really hankers after derelicts any more than earth does. It just puts up with them——”

“ My dear, dear Julia, pray don’t ! ”

But Miss Gaunt was now at full gallop.

“ And a woman with everything, like Mary, to be trying experiments on fools ! Look at her ! ”

“ My dear ! Mr. Turton is not a fool.”

“ Of course he is with Mary looking at him. She’s enough to make a fool of any man.”

She paused to glare. “ Look at her ! I believe the devil himself tied that ribbon.”

Cousin Ella gasped, and Julia at last remembered her manners and laughed.

“ Good gracious ! ” she said. “ What a tornado ! And to see you in full rectitude of mind so like a piece of good old Dresden china blushing for me. It’s a wonder I haven’t learnt more from you all these long years, Ella.”

“ But, dear Julia,” said Ella ingenuously, “ you’re far too clever to learn anything from anybody.”

“ Oh, Ella ! Oh, ‘ Diamond—Diamond ’ ! ”

“ I say—there’s the—oh, call Robert ! —Let us behave like human beings,” and suddenly, at sight of Ella’s puzzled face of entreaty, her friend’s spacious laugh rang out.

The Bishop heard it as he walked with mild, ecclesiastical distinction through the light crowd, with a heavily-laden waiter in tow, and there was a blessing in his kind eyes as he passed. How often in the dark and terrible solitude of those long years had not the fullness of heart and soul articulate in that laugh, restored his own waning forces. It was Julia’s laugh, he often told himself, that had saved his little handful of souls.

“ Perhaps I ought to have given God all the glory,” he would remind himself—“ but I can’t so long as that laugh rings so true in my heart, and holds my soul as nothing else has ever done to its magnet.—And now, at last, to be able to sit down beside it for a little and rest, before beginning again,” he thought, as he made his way through the smiling groups. “ And to be able to offer her some of the little common pleasures of life not yet lost to us like those

others, which time has taken.—It's a wonderful coming-home. It's more than I deserve.—Alice was so very efficient, and she died, poor thing, before I was made a Bishop. She would greatly have enjoyed her position,—and when one thinks of her efforts on my behalf !——”

He blushed deeply.

Those terrible journeys home to hunt up ecclesiastical influence, and Bishops flying before Alice like chaff before the wind ! Although now only five paces from Julia, the Bishop shuddered.

It spoke volumes for Robert Lindsay that he got his Bishopric, in the end, in spite of his inestimable wife.

Julia's honest red face and the twinkle in her clear grey eyes,—the only presentable feature in her face,—soon obliterated every trace of Alice, and the Bishop was himself again.

“I have invited Mrs. Mirrilies,” he said, “and Mr. Turton, and those delightful boys to join us, and meanwhile we shall have the pleasure of watching our young friends, and that very young mother, dancing.”

“Mary is twenty-eight,” said Miss Gaunt.

“She looks eighteen,” said Robert, looking more man than Bishop.

“Thank goodness, Alice hasn't tidied all his humanity out of him, and that he's still young enough to be a fool,” reflected Miss Gaunt, relenting towards Mary.

“I'm glad you're still young enough to be a fool,” she said precipitately.

The Bishop looked scared. A sudden spring back over thirty years being certainly enough to scare any man.

“But,” she cried, “if the years had left us nothing ! If we were all unconditionally wise, think of the horror of it.”

“Still, the usual deposit of the years——”

“Oh, don't say it.—Unless wisdom is qualified by folly it's as bad as,—chalk in our bones. If the years left us nothing but the rags and tatters of wisdom torn off the tree of life probably with bleeding fingers where should we be ? ”

The Bishop was too breathless to reply. In a second or

so, however, a whimsical understanding of her slipped in, and he turned, with a quick movement, to watch Peter Turton and Mary in the mazes of the "Boston."

"It was the 'Trois Temps' and the 'Blue Danube,' in our day," he murmured, as though to himself.

"But you never danced," said Miss Gaunt, sharp and accusing.

"But I wanted to immensely. That, too, was youthful folly," said the Bishop. "A waltz, as graceful as the waltz of those days, could have done no one but a young prig any harm."

"Goodness gracious!" said Miss Gaunt. "And to lose all the dances of four weeks for all of us from a sheer error of judgment! It was you who made me lose them. I didn't want to be outdone in high thinking, or anything else, in those days."

He watched her with a far-away smile.

"If you were kind or foolish enough to wish to emulate so egregious a prig, you had at least your reward. I admired your self-sacrifice, and my own, immensely. Now I am sorry to have deprived us both of an innocent pleasure. A most delightful one to have been able to look back upon in sadder days. The years, I fear, have left us all our follies intact, however little they may have added to our wisdom,—or even to the chalk in our bones.—I fancy we've both escaped rheumatism. Dear me! I wish that I could repair my early error and yours," he said, smiling at the whirling couples.

Miss Gaunt roared genially, and Cousin Ella, scandalized as she undoubtedly was, could not restrain a little silvery giggle.

"But it's Mary's present not our own past folly, we should be thinking of now."

"My dear Julia," blushed Cousin Ella.

"The—er—Bishop," said Miss Gaunt, stoutly, "can see as plainly as we do the way she is diluthering a man with as much common sense as any of us."

"Mary is absolutely unconscious—"

"Oh, bother, Ella,—with that ribbon in her hair! Is

that ribbon for us ? or for the boys ? or the Bishop ? Just tell me that."

" It's—it's because she's beautiful."

" Well, of course it is, but she couldn't have put it in like that a week ago to save her life, or looked as she's looking now, either. Oliver and the Bishop are already age-old friends, Mary is the business of us all."

" Or the business of Mrs. Mirrilies," he said gently.

" We're not busybodies," protested Miss Gaunt.

" No. But you're the only mothers a young and beautiful woman has, and she, I think, is standing at some parting of the ways, of which even her mothers know nothing."

" And are we miserable poor little tramps, to stand aside as usual, and let the great ship go down, hoping later on to pick up some corpses ? "

" Julia ! My dear ! " remonstrated Cousin Ella.

But the Bishop understood only too well the pain that could wring bitterness from that kind heart.

" We must do what we can as her convoy," he said, " since you have done me the great honour to include me also. But we cannot take her bearings or read her compass ; we cannot even direct her course. Each one of us is the ' Captain of his own soul.' And I believe, little as I know her, that Mrs. Mirrilies is in good hands."

He paused to watch her dancing. " Confidence in her convoy is a great help to a ship," he said. " And I don't think Mrs. Mirrilies could hurt anyone permanently,—any more than she could hurt her child."

" Mary, just now, is unaccountable."

" It seems to me that we,—you and I," he said in a low moved voice, " understand her only too well.—Shall we enjoy the evening with Mrs. Mirrilies and Mr. Turton and the boys ? " he said, in his usual even tones, turning to Cousin Ella, " and leave the rest, knowing it to be quite safe ? "

With a sigh of acute relief, Cousin Ella dropped Mary, and all she involved, into the ecclesiastical arms. No one but herself knew the inexpressible joy of being taken over, lock, stock and barrel, by a Bishop.

She turned to watch Mary, no longer the least afraid of the ribbon in her hair. Lazarus in Abraham's bosom could not have felt more sheltered and secure.

Miss Gaunt looked at her and laughed.

"I wish I was Ella," she said, not troubling to lower her voice. Ella in her present condition was impervious to irrelevant comment.

"I'm extremely glad you're yourself," said the Bishop.

* * * * *

Mrs. Mirrilies was much too good-natured to cut short the boys' dances, and much too fond of the "Boston," not to wait for the interruption of the Lancers, to claim her sit-out and Peter Turton's story.

Besides, feeling her beauty was still so new as to be extraordinarily stimulating, she did not want to cut that short either, she wanted to enjoy it until she had had enough of it.

Mary couldn't understand herself in the least. She could have laughed aloud in her ridiculous delight in herself, in the odd, impersonal way in which she shared it with all the others. She felt their joy in her just as though she were one of them. It seemed to give her an illimitable right in the world. A sense of triumphant fellowship she had never before experienced. She seemed to be giving with both hands and getting back more than she gave. The whole world was more beautiful because of her beauty.

Then all at once she knew that the only one who neither got nor gave was Oliver, probably at that very moment in his painstaking, patient way, trying to dance with Barbara.

Barbara's steps, like her intentions, were all that anyone could wish, but she couldn't dance.

Whereupon every atom of delight seemed to be shaken out of Mary, and she was glad enough to turn her back, not on the Lancers, as she had arranged, but on the "Boston" itself, and to sit down beside anything in the very least like Oliver, the outcast.

"He's shut out of everything—everything," she told

herself, " and he's done it himself, or perhaps we've done it between us. I don't know,—I know nothing now, it seems. And,—and,—this other man—why can't he say anything, and change the subject ? "

She glanced vindictively at an innocent fountain at their feet. " The sound of that water will drive me mad," she said.

So they sat for some minutes with the fountain reiterating silver nothings in their ears.

Peter Turton was watching with astonishment her face losing all its glory, and once again forgetting himself. It was a rank bad habit and he was always falling into it now. And he,—who had never spoken of his ten years' idiocy to one of his many friends, to be about to disclose it now to the acquaintance of a week or so,—to give himself away, at last, after the tight grip on what at this moment seemed centuries. It was a weakness of which he would have believed himself incapable a week ago.

" You never know what you are until you meet a woman," he thought grimly. " And I'd be glad to know why everything that makes me tell her,—that's driving me into making some sort of an ass of myself, is fading out of her face,—she'll be like any other woman next,—and it won't make the smallest difference to my folly ! An old fool has no chance at all, and when folly has become a habit—— ! I'll go to London after this and get tired of women,—and then the other confounded habit will be coming in again, and putting its foot in everything. I never deliberately injured a woman yet, and that'll probably trip me up in the end."

* * * * *

" Women are the deuce, whichever way you look at them. I wish she'd go off in a tantrum, and that a man would stroll in."

" Do you know what I was just thinking," he said, with a laugh ; " I was wishing you'd get fed up with my abominable manners, and sail off in a rage, and yet I have neither enough higher-education or common sense to ask you to go."

"But I shouldn't go. I want to hear."

"To sit deliberately down to rake up your past for a woman's benefit is pretty low down, don't you think? Oh! I have every intention of making you listen, and yet it's rum."

"Well, begin then. I have more dances, and the Bishop's reception is at ten. And aren't you glad you met us all and are right in the thick of it, and will be in at the end? I'm going to have a beautiful wedding at home, and to ask you all to see the finishing touch to the resurrected lovers."

"When I've finished, perhaps you'll tell me why I told you what in no sort of way could concern you,—perhaps it won't even interest you. But you've got to hear it,—it's Kismet."

He was most disturbingly like Oliver. But Oliver, with plainly enough heaps to say, had generally shut up like a clam in the end. *She* had shut him up.

"Oh, tell me everything," she said, just as though she were speaking to Oliver. She saw him there,—he sat beside her, and never in all her life had she spoken to him in this voice, with this face; with a prick of intolerable pain she knew this.

And now he hardly missed the glory of her face for the gentleness of it.

What is the matter with her or with me? he thought, and why was she here alone and in despair,—or at any rate, on the high road to despair?

"The spray from the fountain is sprinkling your dress," he said. "I haven't had anything to do with soft things for a long time, but I seem to remember that water used to hurt them. That's right," he said, as she moved a little.

"I once spoiled a woman's dress for her in a water-shute. I didn't tuck her in properly, and that's how it all began. It had come from Paris, and things from Paris didn't come every day. She was pretty wild with me, sort of under her breath, but she forgave me, and later on she married me. But it wasn't only to tuck her in, I forgot. I was always forgetting things, and presently she began to think I forgot

her,—I believe I loved her as much as a boy of twenty-one can love a girl of eighteen, when neither of them are quite grown up.—We quarrelled and made it up like children, and enjoyed ourselves in our own way. My father gave me an ample allowance, and my expectations were good. My uncle had been married for fifteen years without children, and I was his heir. I had eaten all my dinners, and was about to follow my profession with a comfortable sense of leisure and serenity. I had plenty to give Dolly, and she wanted a good deal. Then suddenly one day a boy appeared at the old place, and the week after Dolly and I, both with very wry mouths, had assisted at the rejoicings, my father died, leaving nothing behind him but debts. So I had to work for all I was worth, too young.

“ We left our house and took a little flat, and the habit of forgetfulness grows with poverty. Now I forgot everything except to keep things going somehow, and to ensure some sort of a future for both of us.

“ I was too tired at night even to talk, and I don’t think I ever took her out. I was waiting to do it properly. She was meant for a big house and big ways. She looked ridiculous in a little mean flat at Fulham, and I hated to think of her on the top of a bus. She was miserably lonely, I think.

“ I took it for granted, I believe, that I loved her, but there seemed to be no time to let her feel it. I had thrown myself into the future, and was living for it. It was her future of course, but I doubt if Dolly ever grasped that. She was hankering after her present, poor child. And now I look at you,—I think she must have been very badly dressed. She was extraordinarily pretty, it must have been hard luck on her, but I was waiting for the future, and Paris, and a thousand hats.

“ I saw nothing but the future. I had an aptitude for Law, a fierce amount of energy, and some influence,—the future was nearer than Dolly suspected.—That was *my* secret. When I was too tired in the evenings to do anything else—I used to dream of it, and chuckle over it, and make out lists of all we’d do, and the things I’d give her.

"But dozing and dreaming don't amuse a woman. She couldn't stand it any longer I suppose, and one day she went off with a cousin of hers, a man I detested. He gave her everything,—and made her love him, but he was cruel, and careless, and it wasn't in him to be faithful. I hurried on the divorce, but he never married her. After it was too late, I realized that it was all my fault. And just to show you what fate is,—my uncle and the boy both died shortly after she left me, and I had the place at twenty-five. It wanted a lot of looking after,—so I gave up my profession, and stuck to the land.

"And since I'd done her all the harm I could,—it was really like hurting a child,—I thought the only thing I could do was to wait until the other fellow got tired of her, or died, and to have the place ready for her."

"Oh," said Mary in an odd voice, and he noticed that she was trembling a little.

"I know now that I never loved her really, but,—oh! well, the only thing one could do, was to keep her chance open for her——"

He broke off short, and Mary knew that he had clean forgotten *her*.

She was still trembling a little, and not quite sure of her voice, but she couldn't sit silent any longer, with Oliver so near and so far.

"And then?" she said at last.

He pulled himself back with a jerk.

"Oh, then he died in Paris, where he had a splendid *appartement*. Directly she knew of his illness she had gone to him. Afterwards I went over, and found her dead beside him. She had taken laudanum. So that was the end of it all. And why I've told you the story I really don't know."

"Because we're friends," said Mary simply.

"It was folly from beginning to end."

"Perhaps. But the only man I have ever known who would be capable of that sort of folly,—to the end—I mean, is Oliver, my husband,—Ah! it's ten o'clock and we mustn't keep the Bishop waiting."

CHAPTER XXII

THERE was another glory altogether upon Mary's face as she and Peter Turton came back together to the little group, sitting in patient expectation about several small rosewood tables.

It was the Bishop's first unofficial reception, and purely of the good warm earth. At the same time he was resolved that it should do credit to the Church, and he and the waiter between them had evolved a light supper worthy of a Cardinal. The everlasting Youth of the world was in that curious meal.

The sight of the little three-cornered dishes of sandwiches of *pâté de foie gras* recalled memories to the Bishop fragrant with Eternal youth. For he had eaten them in his youth with young Julia.

For some minutes Miss Gaunt watched him, wandering guileless as a child from sandwiches to *mélange*, with occasional sips of champagne for good fellowship. "Thank God," she decided, "a little clotted wisdom, and a thousand regrets aren't the only things the years have left us. We've still got digestions. Even with Mary dancing with the wrong man.—She's not dancing"—she decided. "She's just practising her steps, and she thinks them all brand new, and they're all as old as time. And—they've all got to be learned before Mary's finished. And until she knows her steps, I suppose a woman will be dancing to some man's piping.—I couldn't have danced to the piping of the archangel Gabriel himself,—after Robert,—and I wonder if Robert in the least realizes what his little bill for this supper will amount to.—Oh! well. I'm going

to enjoy it now, in spite of Mary," said she, with a vicious and apparently aimless kick beneath her chair. The Bishop felt the vibration, and hoped tenderly that she did not suffer from chilblains. Being aware of its beneficial effect upon the circulation, he insisted upon more champagne.

"It is a wine of a good vintage," he said modestly.
"The waiter is a most careful man."

"He had need to be," she said grimly, "with so many of us hardly out of our shell and the rest,—in an even more critical condition. To judge by this sybarites' feast you've grown a good deal in darkest Africa,—er—Bishop."

"I've been frugal for such endless years," he said, blushing.

"But you're not apologizing to me! You must have forgotten me a good deal or you wouldn't think that I'd disapprove,—even of,—over-abundance, and I'm enjoying every atom of it down to the ground." "To think I'd disapprove," she thought. "I, who have sat through all the dances of thirty years!—And now with my ten toes swaddled in fur to be making indecorous noises under my chair. Has love no sense of humour even at my age?"

"I'd enjoy it all just as much, Bishop, even if you hadn't money to pay the bill, and had to fly in the night."

"I think you'd pay it for me."

"Oh, no, I shouldn't. I'd be too interested in the Pharisees' remarks, but Ella would, and ruin herself in tips to placate the kitchen. Where's your Parish to be, Bishop?"

"Please let it be Robert, dear Julia."

She gave a jump that resounded ever so slightly.
"Dear me!" she thought. "And what of Alice?"

"I hope it will be immense, and full of fools," she said quickly. "Knowing them and all their folly. Above all, knowing the extraordinary little difference there is between the fools and the wise, you'll be able to make them all as wise as fools may be, and yet remain human beings."



They were as near together as they would ever be, and as far from the world, and as near. It would be always like this, the world would always pass by with a little smile, and leave them together,—the two old fools who loved it; but it would be always there for them to serve together. Nothing could ever part them any more, or rob the world of their combined service.

He was so sure of her that for several minutes he said nothing. She thought wildly of his wife.

Outwardly they sat together, each with folded hands.

“Will you help me with the Parish, Julia?”

“But, goodness gracious! where’s your wife?”

He started.

“But—didn’t you know? She died two years ago.”

“And you never gave me a hint! I knew you were as unpractical as ever at heart.”

“I’ve never done anything worth doing without you, Julia, you were always there. And now that the time is short, and the grasshopper is not far off, I want you near.”

“I’d better be near, I think,” she said, looking severely at a fresh tray of cakes and liqueurs being planked down before her, “or you’ll soon be in the poor house.—And—oh, Robert! we’ll defy all the grasshoppers in creation without turning a hair, we two together.”

They stood up together, and began as though it were the most natural thing in the world, to wait upon their guests.

Cousin Ella weeping into her liqueur glass in the end became an embarrassment, and had to be reprimanded, then with the tenderness of mother, sister, child, restored. That was the only hitch in the entertainment. Except Mary, who represented the one poignant note in its folly.

But even Mary must be put off till the next day. This evening was too full of the folly that has paid its toll of pain, to leave even standing room for Mary with her bitter toll of tribute still to pay. Besides Mary was young enough and sweet enough to rejoice whole-heartedly with

the two tired wanderers who had found their home, and she was thrilling with the recent recital of Peter.

For the Bishop, Mrs. Mirrilies was always the mother of Oliver the Less, but even with Robert by her side for ever, she was always the wife of Oliver the Greater, for Miss Gaunt.

Directly Oliver knew he decided to change Mr. Bishop into "Granpa."

"Bishops is for black men, and oder poor sinners," said Oliver the Pharisee, "not for good little boys."

"You've given me everything, Julia," said the Bishop gratefully, as next morning they sat together in a sunny window. "Not only yourself but a sister, and a daughter, and a grandchild, and friends, both among men and boys."

"I wish to goodness I could give you what none of us seem to have just now, commonsense enough to manage Mary."

"Won't you leave her to Oliver and herself, dear Julia?"

"You're like all the others. Your head is turned by Mary, which is odd," she added, with a whimsical glance into the great mirror opposite them, "having just chosen me."

"But that's the reason. Knowing you makes me know Mary also. Your exteriors may be somewhat dissimilar," he admitted, smiling, "but there's a strong family likeness in your hearts."

"Fortunately for Mary it stops there."

"Fortunately for Mary it goes so deep."

"You hopeless optimist! Where does the good fortune for the other man come in?"

"If a man chooses to defy convention and other obstacles to his peace or destiny," he said, pausing, "he's got to put up with his punishment. It will probably be severe,—possibly permanent. One is immensely sorry he needs so stern a retribution, but it's the size of the man that determines the size of the punishment."

"To be thinking of her to the day of his death with that ribbon in her hair!" sighed Miss Gaunt restively.

"And," she reflected in the silence of her soul, "if a saint like Robert is like that, I'll never believe in a sinner again."

"Mary is too wholesome," he said gently, "to hurt any man's soul."

"She seems to be rather a drastic remedy all the same, for the souls of men. I should have thought myself that Mr. Peter Turton's soul would have done very well with less heroic treatment."

"Most of us are given just as much as we're able to bear,—we're seldom taxed below our strength. It gives one great confidence both in Mary, and in Mr. Turton."

"Does Captain Mirrilies love his wife?" he asked after a long pause.

"Yes—like—like anything."

"In that case I think this desperate experiment will cost much treasure."

"And all for sheer wilful perversity. Mary might have left us our few little hours together in peace."

"This from you, Julia! Even now I count our happiness in years, not hours. And think of the delight of having the joys, and sorrows, and mistakes—and sins of our own young to occupy our hearts and minds. Otherwise we'd grow abominably selfish. As it is, we won't have either the time or the chance to do so. And presently we'll grow so learned in youth, Julia, and in all its ways, that sometimes we may be able to help it a little."

CHAPTER XXIII

MARY'S expanding sense of the consciousness of her own power, and strength, and beauty lent her now a joyous *élan* that was supremely attractive.

Moreover, up in the clear, keen air, far from the stifling mists of the valleys, the streets where men walk smileless, the beautiful houses with their gates shut in your face, one can live above the world, and watch from one's eerie Castles of Spain pricking up everywhere. Thus, although the feet of Mrs. Mirrilies were steady as rocks on her skis, the head above them was apparently somewhat light.

In this state of mind one is impelled to say something, and it's generally the first thing that comes to the listener nearest at hand. This, as it happened, was generally Peter Turton, who if he put his mind to it could always outstrip the others.

Anyone who has ever skied to any purpose knows the extraordinary freeing, elevating, and expanding power of the exercise. The world is suddenly all good, and the people in it all friends together. One can do no less than give the best one has to him who wants it most. A man will give his sweater, or his last tot of whisky to another, whom the night before he had rooked shamelessly at cards. And in the white silence of the snows the biggest liar in Europe will find himself put out of action.

Mary had nothing to give but her thoughts, and she gave herself away with them at every turn—always in Parables. Mary who had never written anything less serious than an essay or an intelligent letter, became a teller of fairy tales on the shimmering snows.

Peter Turton being, as we know, just then himself in a dangerous transition period, found his rôle of sole and commentless audience an increasingly onerous one.

Mrs. Mirrilies was at heart essentially a woman in whom there was no guile, so that there was nothing really for a man to do but to preserve her guilelessness and frustrate the folly in it, and since she was more in love with her own husband than she suspected, this might, in ordinary circumstances, have been quite within the powers of even the average man.

Had Mrs. Mirrilies not been the first woman for ten years that Peter Turton had permitted himself to think of as a woman at all, if she had not been the only woman he had ever really cared for, had he not had the accumulation of years of denial to urge him to folly, he might have enacted the rôle of a hero.

As it was Peter might have done better in this matter—and, on the contrary, he might have done worse. At any rate he stayed on at St. Moritz when Mary and her escort, now increased by the Bishop and flanked on either hand by a large and mourning crowd, stood ready for departure.

Mary was glad to go—and sorry. She looked like an April day, and just as young, except that in her fine furs, she was too round and full for young April,—and really more like June.

She was so young, nevertheless, that she hadn't even asked Peter Turton, as a mere matter of course, to call on her if he should be passing through Zürich, and now Oliver was solicitously making up for the omission.

Oliver rarely clamoured: his method was to hold on firmly to a hand until he had got a definite promise, and since no one had ever lied to Oliver, then he was quite happy, but not until the promise was given would he think of releasing the hand.

It was a moment of some embarrassment for Peter Turton. He meant to call, invited or not, unless better counsels prevailed, but he had no desire to reveal his intention to a dozen cocked ears.

"But promise!" said Oliver. "Perhapses is no good. An' if I couldn't see you for ever, an' ever, an' ever—" Oliver valiantly swallowed an emotion,—his mother who was laughing gaily, swallowed another, for her heart smote her for Oliver the Less, and for herself, and above all, for Oliver the Greater. But having gone so far she could not stop now.

She stood already upon the threshold of some new world, and she could not enter it alone, or turn aside from the wonderful city that commanded the entrance to this wonder-world. She had thought it out, and fought it out.

With her two Olivers and in the midst of friends, there was no reason to be either afraid or ashamed of her growing liking for Mr. Turton, of his growing attraction for her, of her curious dependence upon him, and the strange impression upon her that it was only through him that she could ever gain the freedom of the City of her desire without whose golden gates lonely women must stand for ever.

Sometimes she would sit up in the silent night with wide frightened eyes and shudder away from the lonely crowd waiting there in hopeless patience.

She would never have given Mr. Turton a second thought—that counted—but for his amazing likeness to Oliver. She would have danced, and skied, and skated with him, of course, but to think of him as she was now thinking would have been impossible, or to depend upon him any more than she depended on the boys, ludicrous.

There was fear somewhere about during these vigils, so latterly she had already shuddered down under the blankets, and got up tired and confused, too confused in the end, indeed, to give Mr. Turton the invitation he had a perfect right to expect.

And now here was Oliver upon the point of tears! and she herself feeling like a drowning soul that has just lost hold on its last straw,—for a point of conscience perhaps, or a point of view.—She didn't know. She knew nothing.

She smiled as she turned to Peter.

"But, Oliver," she said soothingly, "of course we'll

meet Mr. Turton again, in London,—and next year here—
who knows?"

"But that's too long—It's p'raps never again."

"But Mr. Turton won't be coming through Zürich
probably."

"But I think I shall," said Mr. Turton. "It's just as
well to see the finest panorama in Europe when one is so
near."

"Oh, he'd better come," said Oliver breathlessly, "an'
see it, an' de houses dat shut de chillen in behind the
gates, and de nice ladies who hadn't no time to have
chillen ever."

"Oliver," shouted Peter, "shut up! or I'll have to start
now, and leave my luggage and my bill."

Oliver's last hug was for Peter Turton.

* * * * *

Peter Turton was afraid. He was ashamed of himself. He experienced all the vague and inexplicable sensations that Mary did in an entirely different way, from an entirely different point of view, and he had a rank bad time of it, and decided at last that if he was not fortified by experience, he ought to be, and would certainly see Mrs. Merrilie in Zürich or elsewhere at the first possible opportunity.

CHAPTER XXIV

O LIVER'S Blue One, after a little careful observation had decided to fix her mind and her intentions upon the Bishop. She had tried many younger and more robust men, but had found them all wanting. They had all lacked intelligence, and had apparently no desire whatever to be lifted to any higher plane.

She went with a sigh through the long list, and then mentally tore it up,—they were presentable men, one might have managed very well with any one of them, while the Church presented many disadvantages. At the same time fifteen years unrelaxed effort tries the nerves, and an uninterrupted Hotel diet the digestion, and the most redoubtable adventurer will wish at last to settle down. So she came to the conclusion with a sigh for the loss of bigger game that the Bishop, after all, would do well enough to marry, that she could desist at last from fruitless effort and rest; she could, above all, establish her mother in some convenient home, where the Bishop could look after her, while she tried to raise the tone of the Parish.

Her mother, whom she had at last hustled into acute ill-health, she was now nursing with a high sense of martyrdom, but even that will pale directly its first bloom is brushed off. It was a positive relief to think possessively of the Bishop and to prepare her way to him when her mother's moans would permit her to do anything but try to convince that unhappy woman of their irrational selfishness.

Being an authority upon every subject Miss Pringle had naturally not neglected modern German thought. She had wallowed long days in *Hibbert Journals*, read

extracts from the theologians by the score, and now when not interrupted by moans, she immersed herself in certain audacious professorial heresies obligingly supplied her by Peter Turton.

When not thus engaged she kept up her strength by outdoor exercise.

Now when the Bishop and Oliver took their walks abroad, no matter in what direction, the sight of the Blue One foundering in the snow, two red legs pathetically wobbling, became the rule, not the exception. While now inspired by the craft of the mating instinct she no longer howled for help, or having attained it, called down the vengeance of Heaven upon her saviour. She became mild and full of trust. She leant weightily upon the little Bishop, and made Oliver more than once, very sick with propitiatory offerings of unwholesome sweets.

After dinner she brought down blood-curdling heresies to be refuted by the dear Bishop, and made illuminating remarks about cannibals and the missionary spirit. She completely ignored Miss Gaunt, who did what she could for her suffering mother and bided her time.

When she and the Bishop came out one day together, plainly one, anyone might have knocked the Blue One down with a feather. She was stirred to her depths, and the depths of Miss Pringle were abysmal. She cleansed her mind of heretical literature and hatched schemes of vengeance.

Nothing could make the old fools, or their affairs more ridiculous than their own folly had made them, but they seemed to outdo themselves in senile idiocy over Mrs. Mirrilies. Here one might score, so Miss Pringle fixed Mary with her inexorable eye, and thought it out.

As a rule she steered clear of grass widows. More than one had proved one too many for her, and even Miss Pringle wasn't too proud to learn by experience. A direct attack upon a grass widow being therefore inexpedient, the question now was how best to shatter her from some safe ambush.

Much can be done by correspondence, she reflected.

Although she had few friends, Miss Pringle had many acquaintances. She enjoyed letter writing. She looked upon it as one of her many gifts, and liked nothing better than to fasten a correspondence upon some unoffending creature, and what a lady may not dare to say face to face even to the most docile, she can quite easily put into a letter.

So many of her correspondences had died young, however, that the fact added greatly to the difficulties of Miss Pringle, in the matter of Mary.

She cudgelled her brains for some suitable recipient of her confidences in regard to Mrs. Mirrilies.

And one day she remembered, as though by a stroke of Providence, a young woman she had once extricated from a tight place, and on the strength of it enforced a correspondence. It also had broken off short, but she had her address, and it was in India, and in India, as we all know, news spreads. There were other points. The girl had married a sapper. Captain Mirrilies was also a sapper.—Nothing could be better!

Miss Pringle drew a sharp breath of relief, and wrote her letter with a free hand and a mind assured.

Elaine Dalton was a vixen at heart, and seven years older than her young fool of a husband. She had always escaped the slightest breath of scandal, and stung by the fact, was merciless to those more fortunate than herself. She was an ideal medium.

She might not know Captain Mirrilies, indeed, but Miss Pringle knew well that she would know considerably more about him than he knew himself, and that any first-hand information would be used to the best advantage. That was Elaine's affair. Hers was to make her letter all that a letter should be.

It was, to be sure, a masterpiece, as true as truth, written with a high-minded toleration that would undoubtedly astonish Elaine, and leaving Mrs. Mirrilies not one loophole of escape.

"Mr. Turton was a delightful person," she said, "with a wide, profound, and deeply speculative mind, one of

the very few young men in whom a woman of real intelligence could find her complement. Mrs. Mirrilies, although shallow and frivolous, had had an unusually good education, and had enough sense to be immensely flattered by the open attentions of such a man. One was sorry but not surprised at the scandal. They were always together.

"Mrs. Mirrilies was in the midst of friends, women, Heaven knew, old enough to know how to take care of her, and nice innocent boys, the very contact with whom might at least have made her more careful, to say nothing of her own little son, a charming little child."—She wrote with clenched teeth, remembering an evil little trick he had lately played her.

"It is all very sad," she sighed. "One can only be very, very sorry for Captain Mirrilies. But what manner of man can he be himself to give so young and apparently foolish a woman so absolutely free a hand. It's a most dangerous experiment.

"I myself would have ventured to speak to Mrs. Mirrilies, but with women old enough to be my mother as bodyguard about her, it would have been absurd. Nevertheless, the friends she has made here and with whom she spends the time not devoted to Mr. Turton, are people to whom I should refuse to say good morning, aliens of high rank and no morals. Transgressors, who have already made history. In this young woman whose follies probably will be but the talk of an hour, they recognize an affinity in an infinitesimally small way and are amused at her little efforts. We are all Bourgeoise of the smallest, my dear Elaine, even to the Excellency and the Highness who has lost her character.

"It is all unutterably sad, and yet as a student of human nature,—I am naturally interested. Possibly your husband knows Captain Mirrilies and will be interested also.

* * * * *

"With even more love than usual, dear,

"Always yours,

"BERTHA."

CHAPTER XXV

FOR some reason best known to themselves, the stars in their courses, seemed now to fight for Barbara in just these very matters, in which formerly they had fought against her.

Not only were her pretty figure, her delicate colour, the shy surprising light in her hazel eyes coming back to her, but apparently her husband also.

A remarkable change was taking place in that stricken household. Major Quayle no longer heckled his terrified wife into debasing furtiveness. He was beginning to take an intelligent interest in her. She could now walk upright under his approving eyes.

It was wonderful to Barbara to be pretty again, and necessary, but it was almost more wonderful still to be free. A free human creature, whom people wanted, and liked to look at! The change in Frank was extraordinary indeed, and from every point of view. He no longer smiled horribly at any mention of Captain Mirrillies, and more horribly still at the little services she continued to offer him, in spite of her husband's petrifying smiles. Major Quayle now identified himself with his wife in kindly attentions to Oliver. He went out of his way to foster the intimacy, and showed a side of himself to Captain Mirrillies never before apparent.

Oliver had never liked the man, and had detested his behaviour to his poor little wife, but he seemed to be a very different fellow from what he was, and naturally one's first impulse is to give the benefit of the doubt to anyone trying to turn over a new leaf. Captain

Mirrilies met all Quayle's advances half way, and was increasingly surprised at the change that had come over the miserable household. The whole state of affairs seemed to be pulling round, and to watch the rather naïve ways of the recently emancipated slave became a pleasure.

Instead of being the last straw to a tiring day, Barbara was now becoming something of a pick-me-up. Instead of yawning consumedly, and wishing to goodness Mary were there to take her on, Captain Mirrilies found himself smiling as he strolled across to the other Bungalow, after a hard day's work.

He knew exactly what to expect. He'd find the two sitting together as thick as thieves. Barbara quite refreshingly fresh considering what she used to be. She had always seemed to wither the very flowers. At any rate they were never fresh. Now they were as fresh as Barbara.

It was all new enough to be always something of a pleasant surprise, especially the brand new oneness of the two. Sometimes as he watched them, he wondered what the beloved creature of infinite parts who had never become one with even herself, who didn't know the meaning of the magic word, would think of it all. At any rate, there was one thing about the new Barbara, that would appeal to Mary.

Whereas formerly she had always said the wrong thing in the presence of her husband, she now invariably said the right. It was a queer reversal of influences, and amused Captain Mirrilies. He was very much over-worked just then; and was glad not to be called upon for any more strenuous emotion. When he came to think of it, Barbara had been a more fatiguing quantity in his life than a woman has any right to be. She owed him some reparation. Often now he took almost a malicious pleasure in making her show her paces.

Major Quayle, his wife, and Captain Mirrilies had very pleasant half-hours together at this period, but they rarely lasted longer. Then, though the night was still young, Major Quayle would gather up his papers

and make off with a laugh,—but only into the next room. He always left the door open, and called back from time to time agreeable nothings with his pen between his teeth.

It was no affectation of work. Major Quayle could work like a German when he wanted to, and he preferred night to day for his labours.

The ambition of the man was insatiable, and the more complicated his aims the clearer seemingly grew his vision, and the greater his powers of self-control.

It may be granted that Major Quayle just at this difficult crisis of his fate stood at the very top of his being.

Anyone who has experienced the same difficulty will know that it requires not alone nerves of steel, and a heart of iron, but positive genius, to conceal as effectually as Major Quayle was now doing a real ingrained aversion to a wife.

A neighbour or a neighbour's wife, a friend, or even an enemy, can only be an occasional irritant. She can be avoided or, better still, utilized. A wife, that is if she is a fool, and implacably virtuous, is as inevitable as she is worthless. To utilize her from any point of view calls for all the powers, and all the intelligence of the unhappy husband.

And when a man's whole future hangs on his right manipulation of almost impossible material, subtle intricacies within himself, hitherto unsuspected, will inevitably unfold themselves. The depths of his own being just then frequently surprised the Major.

They surprised Barbara, and Captain Mirrilies considerably more, and they quite honestly called the qualities emerging day by day by eminently reputable names, and had increasingly agreeable times together. It was now the most natural thing in the world to give and take as good friends will, without an afterthought.

It was, of course, the fact that she had at last done a great thing for some human creature, her first high sense of success after the slow long years of defeat, that first effectually woke Barbara to her own significance.

That after those long unwanted years she too could be

missed—that she too had a place of her own “under the sun,” from whence she could govern and give; that she was no longer a beggar at the gates, not daring even to ask an alms, but taking what was thrown, and trying not to offend.

The change was incredible! Barbara was humble with gratitude. When she stopped crying for joy in the first great illumination, she was still dazed with it. Her exaltation of delight was so great, so wild, and dazzling as to make her forget even that what she had done, and suffered, was all for a man she had not the smallest right to be serving, and had perhaps just as well not have been done and suffered at all.

The moral issues, however, did not just then trouble Barbara. She had no time for them. She was only anxious beyond words to be giving. To give, give, give was the one thing that stood out clear in her vague passion of feeling.

She had had so many things on her heart to give away all those years, that she felt rather like a teapot too full to pour, and laughed like a girl one day as she came out on the verandah, causing her husband to stare, and hazard in the silence of his soul some new conjecture in regard to the creature, more damaging than all the others. He greeted her amiably, however, and asked her to go for a drive!

A woman anxious to give the best of her, which is always herself, will never fail for want of a chance. Chances now seemed to crop up under the very feet of Barbara, and the more she gave, the more she had to give. Now that her eyes were opened, she saw things in the little station she had never seen before, and now stories she had never suspected told themselves to her without a word, and she was so gentle and unobtrusive in the way she gave, that the demands upon her store were so many, that even *she* might have become impoverished but for the accumulations of the silent years.

It was a wonderful joy, and she enjoyed it to the full. But the station was so small, she wanted a world!

Then one day she remembered things that Captain Mirrilies had often said about the many millions that permit us to rule them, of whom we know about as much as we do of our dogs and treat perhaps as kindly in our dim way. Oliver Mirrilies had always had a hankering to know the native, to get to the bottom of his point of view, to plumb the depths of his curious heart, and so to make some sort of a shot as to what he likes and loathes, and his reasons for so utterly despising us after all our efforts on his behalf.

But he had so little time. He had often said to Mary that this was her job not his, an essentially feminine occupation. That it was the genius of some woman which would in the end unlock the soul of India, and then we should at last know her.

And now Barbara remembered all this, and Mary's funny little comments, and the capacity with which she managed her servants, her justice, wisdom, kindness, and her absolute ignorance of the native heart.

Barbara remembered everything. Above all she remembered feeling that had she been Mary, she could have understood everything, even a native, and then she used to go home and try little experiments on her own household, and somehow a *rapport* had grown up between the despised wife and the conquered people.

Sometimes then Barbara had winced at her pitiful little appeals to the subject race. Now she rejoiced and was proud that in some slight degree, so slight as to be almost unappreciable, she had at least begun. She was spared the shy agonies that beset her, in spite of her eager desire, in all her other efforts.

Often in the dawning of this new life she felt like a child tottering out to walk. She seemed to herself so clumsy and inept amongst her own people walking confidently up and down the hard high road; that still hurt the feet of this poor woman, only learning to walk.

But with those others who went softly to and fro on the bye-ways, she was already at home and on the way to be friends, and that way once found you can never

lose again. That is, if you have gone into the bye-ways, with the pain or the blessedness in your own heart that alone will draw hearts to it, hearts that have leisure to sit beside wood fires, and to see the things that are upon films of smoke.

The want of organization, of even intelligent interest in the bearing of Barbara, let loose speech. She just sat still with a child on her lap, and let those tellers of tales from the beginning, reveal themselves. This Mem Sahib came in and out as a spirit of the night. She had no good counsel to offer, no opinion to impose, no new God to advertise. She sat still and understood.—A Mem Sahib to receive the wisdom and experience of those who have lived life.

The influence of Barbara was so tranquillizing, and so reassuring, that after their first impulse to lie had worked itself out, the women found that it required less effort and imagination to speak truth than lies, and she seemed to like truth, this Mem Sahib, and to love the children.

So all she could gather of the myriad life upon the bye-ways, that belonged to the soul of the world, she was just putting into words now for a man who had no time. She put it as nearly as she could into the words of those who spoke it, and they were very beautiful, and her voice grew insensibly as soft and as melodious as theirs, and Barbara looked as no man in his senses could have believed that Barbara could look.

The subject was absorbing, and so was Barbara. Naturally enough Captain Mirrilies became so absorbed in the strange surprise of both that he forgot everything else.

Major Quayle could make neither head nor tail of what they were absorbed in. Nigger lore had no attraction for him, thank God, but he saw and heard quite enough for practical purposes.

Sometimes as the evening wore on, and he was clean forgotten, he whistled softly with a little curious smile.

CHAPTER XXVI

PETER TURTON, through no virtue of his own, broke faith with Oliver in the end. The sudden illness of a friend sent him home, at a moment's notice, and at full speed. He took care to explain the matter to Mrs. Mirrilies in a way that satisfied even Oliver, but it left Mary with a doubt in her heart.

He said nothing of coming back, or of any future meeting in England. There was something kept back. There was a very great deal being kept back. Of that Mary was sure, and she wondered what it was.

To wonder acutely about Mr. Turton was not altogether exhilarating, but it was almost a relief now Oliver the Greater was becoming a problem so immense, so insoluble, that it seemed to be crushing heart, power, and imagination. Oliver seemed to be receding every hour, and Barbara to be encroaching upon everything. Instead of being, as she once was, a mere blot on a long letter, she now blotted out the rest of the letter, leaving nothing but herself.

Barbara was becoming impossible !

Mary threw herself headlong into her lectures. She became feverishly industrious. She felt very forlorn and acutely missed Mr. Turton, who, apparently, did not mean to return. And yet it was all so ridiculous, his return was inevitable !

He had entered into the life of the whole party, he had made his place, and meant to keep it. Miss Gaunt grimly held her tongue about him, but he babbled in and out of Cousin Ella's letters, and in a long letter from the Bishop there was a delightful mention of him.

He had done more than anyone would ever know, it seemed, for the boy whose illness had called him home, a creature whom no man could help, and who now, in his last extremity, had begun to wonder if even God Himself can help a failure. The position was beyond Peter, so he had asked the Bishop to take it over.

Having been himself a leader of forlorn hopes for the greater part of his life, the Bishop knew more of failures than most men, and perhaps a little more of God, and suckled and reared in an atmosphere of hereditary prejudices too strong and harsh for his feeble powers, very early in the day Gilbert Falconer had seen sin at least kinder and more merciful than religion, and had gone over to the enemy. The little, futile, mean sinning of the feeble soon wore him out, and when the Bishop found him, he was cowering away under the blankets, literally hiding his head to ward off the hideous menace of his awful ancestral religion.

The Bishop let the light and air in upon the boy's aching head, fed him, and amused him a little, and presently, just as if it were the most natural thing in the world,—just a fact that had escaped the sick boy—he showed Gilbert himself in Christ, and sin a mere interloper.

With deft and gentle hands the Bishop pushed the torturing horrors of remembered vice back into the darkness, and drew this foolish child of God out into the light of his Father.

Barrier after barrier fell, veil after veil was rent in twain as the boy was drawn forth from the darkness, and his dim vision cleared. He understood as he had never understood before the full horror of having failed. He had been too dull to understand it before, too dull to understand anything, to understand above all that, in spite of failure, even he,—the outcast,—was worth—worth—everything to God, and the world.

It was too big a thought,—it tired him,—and now,—that he was just beginning to,—to grow to it,—he must go,—go.

The boy was still terrified out of his wits as he entered the blackness of the last tunnel that leads to the Land of New Endeavour, but he held on, with the tenacity of Death itself, to the leading hand, till at last he saw the Light.

This was not the way the Bishop put it, but it was just how it all happened, and how Mary read it.

Peter Turton needed no imagination. He stood out clear and plain in the kind letter, a white man, which showed the confidence of the Bishop in the goodness of a good woman, or perhaps the irrepressible youth and the irrational faith in this born leader of forlorn hopes.

No doubt it had its effect in common with the silence of Miss Gaunt in the subsequent awakening of Mary. At the moment it made her think a great deal of Peter Turton and her other friends. It made her at last fall to upon making plans for them all, in her own way. With the *débonnaire* insolence of the young married woman, she took the affairs of the old lovers and everyone else into her own hands. She decided that the wedding should be in the Easter holidays, when the boys and she would be free. Oliver's mother should have her share in the festivities, since the wedding would be from her house, and Mr. Turton, as a matter of course, should be invited.

In the exhilaration of her soul Mary therefore cut a Lecture, gave a Tea-party, and put on a new dress for it.

Since her return from St. Moritz, the behaviour of Mrs. Mirrilies, had in the opinion of all her anxious guardians, been eminently unsatisfactory. The voracious avidity with which she worked, the horrible intelligence of her conversation, her fatal forgetfulness.

One day, to the mute horror of Hallowes, one shoe had little steel beads all over it, while the other had nothing, and any fool could notice the way she did her hair. She'd be wearing blue glasses next.

She confounded her bodyguard. It felt in its bones that anything Slav with its uncanny intuition, would notice at once, and misunderstand. No one could blame Lasotovitsch for being a Russian, but as they *felt* what

he'd be thinking, and inevitably be putting it down to the boys, looked solemnly down their noses.

With the communal instinct of those in woe to huddle together, the boys and the Moth had now come very close to each other. For she also, in her little sensitive way, could perceive some veil upon her sun and divined a husband, where they divined Peter.

The three were growing very much attached to each other, not for Mary's sake in the end, but for their own also. The boys had called more than once on Miss Caldecott, and Miss Caldecott had even launched out into a little Tea-party of her own at a Tea-shop, which went like cream in spite of Mary's only coming in at the tail end, having been detained by a Lecture.

That Mrs. Mirrilies could have permitted any Lecture on earth to keep her from Miss Caldecott's first Tea-party, only drew closer the ties that bound the friends. There was a taste of funeral meats in the cakes that somehow added to their flavour. Miss Caldecott's heart beat with joy at the size of her coming bill.

When Mary did arrive she ate only two little cakes. Mary ! who could devour like any boy ! This was a tragic note, but in spite of it, and in spite of Mary's only turning up at the end, they hadn't been bored. That was the wonderful thing, the thing to rejoice and be glad in.

Miss Caldecott had been possessed by a horrid fear that just as she was beginning to know them, she was too old perhaps for boys. The Tea-party reassured her considerably more than the Lecture had done Mary.

It was by a great man upon a subject that must enlighten and illuminate a woman puzzled with life if anything ever did, so keen and alive was it with life.

Nothing less vital would have induced Mary to play Miss Caldecott's first Tea-party so scurvy a trick, and since she couldn't explain this either to the boys or to Miss Caldecott, she had to put up with their misconstructions as well as with her own bitter disappointment, besides having her appetite taken away by heartless abstractions without one hint in them that might serve as

a spur to rational behaviour hurled at her for three parts of a stricken hour.

The subject was so sharp and terrible with life that it seemed almost miraculous that even a German Professor should kill it dead with one stroke of his tongue, and yet he did, and Mary could have killed *him* without a qualm. She had lost her tea and hurt the dear little Moth and all for nothing.

* * * * *

So now the sight of Mrs. Mirrilies in a new frock was as exhilarating as an electric shock to her friends, and with the same snap of incipient danger in it.

"Her husband," thought Miss Caldecott, with thankfulness. "It's going better."

"Peter Turton," thought the boys, with strong disfavour. The Russian's eyes expanded like black wings, and he quoted poetry of an erotic nature in the silence of his soul.

Mary divulged her plans quite naturally and at full speed. She looked as guileless as Oliver, who was more like a flame in ecstasy than ever, and had every detail of the wedding cut and dried.

Miss Caldecott dried two foolish little tears that had forced themselves from their hiding-place. She was feeling rather alone again amidst a thousand duties, just as she used to feel, but now she was no longer accustomed to it. It was very ridiculous and very selfish. She had always been happy in her duties and been thankful they were so many.—Oh, yes, she had been happy and blessed, and after all she had never had any real place in this antique romance that Mary was making every moment more adorable.

It really was ridiculous ! Mary's relatives hardly knew her. She would only be in the way, but when one has almost forgotten to be lonely ! . . . All the same it was most ridiculous, and one ought to be able to leave these difficult things to God. Miss Caldecott tried hard to leave them, and was now telling a little story to Oliver

about bread and butter, and a fairy, who, if a little puritanical, was an entralling person, and took all the dullness out of bread and butter instead of too much cake, in a way to astonish you. And then just as it was finished Mary pounced upon her.

"And now for your part in the programme," said she. "You're part and parcel of our life; it would spoil everything if you weren't in it in its first important development, so you'll just have to chuck all your duties and make time to come with us."

"Oh—but—"

"Now just shut up. It's settled. My mother-in-law is giving me a little suite of rooms in her big empty house and tells me to ask anyone I like, so Fräulein will have one room and you the other, and Oliver a tiny dressing-room off mine, and there we all are."

"But—but—" petitioned the little Moth.

"There's no but,—we want you. Oliver, and the boys, and I."

"You just leave her to us and Oliver," said Hallowes. "We'd never get on without you in London, don't you see,—not now. I say, Mrs. Mirrilies, look here," he said, displaying a faultless silk sock, "all that was a hole last week, and she put in a heel without the ghost of a ridge in it."

"Goodness gracious!" said Mary, "that's more than ever I did for you. Do you mean to say she's actually taken you on like that!" She took a step forward to reflect upon the group, and turned back to the tea-table.

"It's plain enough we can't get on without you," she said. "When Cousin Ella would be boring me to death and driving my mother-in-law to funeral marches, you'll be there to take her on. You'll take over Oliver in his evil hours, and be a mother to all our clothes and do all our packing. You'll be worked to the bone by the time we're done with you. Settle it up quick, boys, and let her come and look after the tea. I must try to keep the other boys from feeling out in the cold."

"Lasotovitsch," she said, coming closer, and in a guarded voice, "said something about going to England in the holidays; shall we ask him?"

The boys stiffened.

"You can't be expected to ask the whole of Europe. Besides, he's not Greek Church, he's a Roman Catholic and devout in his way. Watching a Bishop who ought to know better at his age, getting married, would amuse him very much."

"Oh!" said Mary, her eyes still glued to the beautiful youth. "He's intelligent and broad-minded. He'll soon get over that. It would make me feel more at home in those great empty rooms having him in and out. Cousin Ella has offered rooms. I'm rather anxious about him; he's less expansive, and he's taken lately to mentioning someone of the name of Yolande in a broken voice,—when you're not there," hastily interposed Mary. "I'm certain there's some sort of a fall from grace afoot. He'd better come. A few weeks of England may modify his views or blur his memory."

"To have him all day at our heels?"

"It won't be *your* heels. It'll be mine. Oliver, take him into the corner away from the others, and ask him."

"Yes," said Oliver with alacrity, "but——" he paused and cast an affectionate glance round room and verandah, "but couldn't we ask 'em all, dear darling?"

"Oh; Oliver, we couldn't. Your grandmother would think we were dumping the Tower of Babel down on her. Ladies in England like things they can understand."

"Will Granny understand me?" inquired Oliver rather anxiously.

"No, dear, but she'll love you so much that it won't matter in the least. It's only when we don't love things or people enough," she added with an odd laugh, "that we want so horribly to understand them."

"But I want to know about everything too," said Oliver, pausing to reflect.

"Then love it like anything, and it'll tell you all about itself," said Mary the theorist. "And now go over to

Lasotovitsch, and when you're quite sure he can't eat one more cake, ask him."

"I don't think he can eat much more of 'em now," said Oliver after a lingering inspection, and retreated.

Watching to see when people can't eat one more cake was easier anyway than this sort of thing.

"Nice preparation that for his Preparatory School," said Hallowes with stern disapproval.

"I've got to try my tap of misapplied and absolutely inapplicable learning on someone, and Oliver's the easiest."

"Oh, and Lasotovitsch knows just enough, I suppose, to answer you back like all the other dabblers."

"Yes, just to answer you back in a fruitless sort of way," said Mary serenely, "like the Philosophers themselves. At any rate what I've just told Oliver and what lots of the philosophers suggest in other language, would do as well, at any rate, as school does, to get you out of a tight place if only you took the trouble to apply it."

"Oh, no. That's just where you go wrong. If school does nothing else for you, it shows you at least how to get out of a tight place."

"Oh! I mean school,—or rather *The Schools* taken seriously," said Mary magnificently, but with a light smile.

"Even these," said Hallowes gallantly, "can't spoil everyone, although for the last week or so we have been wondering if you hadn't caught something from the air here. Never heard so many hard words in my life before."

"Being English has saved me. The English are immune from infection in the most intellectual air.—Lasotovitsch enjoys my conversation."

"But he relapsed—to Yolande."

"Oh, well, if being as frankly one-syllabled, not to say one-idea'd, as the rest of you has any high value," said Mary, advancing on her crowd, "he won't relapse again."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE resourceful little lady to whom Miss Pringle had sent her chatty letter, after three concentrations upon it, carefully locked it up to let it settle down in her being. She felt that she had got hold of a good thing, and was anxious to lay it out to the best advantage.

Mrs. Dalton made it a rule to tell her husband just as much as was good for him, or a little less. He could find out the rest, and truth being always relative, it would be as true as he deserved.

Young Dalton knew nothing of the letter or its contents. Had he done so, since he was feeling a little sore himself with Mirrilies at the time, he would have been especially careful to have put down his foot in the matter, in the very effectual way he occasionally did. A way well known to his friends, and so very effectual, that to the day of their death none of them could ever quite understand how a fellow with so much latent grit in him, had ever knuckled down to Elaine. The amazed young men knew nothing apparently of the miracle that can be wrought by the menace of time upon a resolute woman. Practice, moreover, at last makes perfect. And the monumental energy that can be concentrated upon her last stand is an incalculable quantity. During the brief period it took her to accomplish her purpose, Elaine had been supreme. What the effect of his subsequent disillusion was, only young Dalton himself knew, and he was silent. It had shocked him at least into being a man.

Unhappily, however, Captain Mirrilies having only known him in his embryo condition under the domination

of Elaine, had just given the post he coveted to another man.

A year ago the slight would have hurt Dalton to the heart for Elaine's sake ; it would have been for Elaine that he would have tried to justify himself before the world. Now he wanted to retrieve his reputation in spite of Elaine, —to refuse to go under because of her unfortunate intrusion into his life. So he concentrated himself upon his work, and kept his eyes open to every chance, and the expectant eye and chances having a natural affinity to one another, he soon caught a glimpse of his in the far distance. It necessitated a short leave, and a journey too rough and rapid for Elaine.

Here was Elaine's opportunity. The bungalow would be unendurable without Harry, so she also would take a little journey.

Having overcome Time in the one great matter, it seemed to be yielding to her now in everything.—After achieving the impossible, everything is possible to a woman.

Mrs. Dalton looked younger by ten years since her marriage, and being set free from all sinister preoccupation, she could now make herself agreeable. She had been too interested in herself as a young girl to interest anyone else, and as an old one had been too anxious to win a position to win hearts.

She certainly made more friends now than she had ever made before. In her long and ruthless career, however, she had made too many enemies not to be well aware that it was chiefly on account of her, that her husband had been passed over.

No one knew better than Mrs. Dalton the reputation of her type, or its effect upon promotion, so her one consuming desire now was, first to convince Captain Mirrilies of his error in judgment, and then to make him suffer for it in his most vital part.

So she now telegraphed off to a friend at Captain Mirrilies' Station whom she hated with the utmost sincerity, accepting her long-standing invitation, and as a wise precaution,

saying that she would be with Mrs. Forth almost as soon as the telegram.

The hungry look gone, the roving eyes tranquillized, the racked leanness due to being always on active service having given place to a comfortable roundness, Elaine was rather an agreeable surprise to her unwilling hostess, and before her stay was over, had managed to inspire a good deal of confidence even among the women. Victory after long defeat had certainly brightened the intelligence of Mrs. Dalton and brought out in her quite unexpected gifts.

The dogged obstinacy underlying the character of Captain Mirrilies made him very tenacious of initial convictions, but even he in the end, felt inclined to look more leniently upon Mrs. Dalton. Perhaps, after all, he ought to have given her the benefit of the doubt, and given Dalton his job. At any rate, the least he could do now was to do all he could for him in the one he was at present out for, and be as civil to the fellow's wife as he could.

Mrs. Dalton had a delightful visit. She saw a great deal of Captain Mirrilies and of Mrs. Quayle, listened to many kindly amused comments on their weird friendship, and with great tact and discretion filled the minds of the Station with the spirited achievements of Mrs. Mirrilies, so arranging matters that sooner or later Captain Mirrilies must hear all about them. Her long and arduous campaign had indeed been a liberal education to Mrs. Dalton.

Having done all that was necessary, she returned to her bungalow.

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Captain Mirrilies was certainly almost phenomenally obstinate. Having once embarked upon any course, nothing less than a miracle or an earthquake would move him from it, no matter what it might cost.

He had changed the whole trend of his life with a laugh, to please his mother, and had, so far, made a triumph of it, but now that Barbara knew him with all her heart, she was perfectly well aware that in his obstinate refusal to turn back from any ideal, any conviction, any path once

deliberately chosen, he might very easily go doggedly forward on the road that leads to destruction.

Barbara was very loyal, and her long years of silence and neglect had, in some regards, anything but sharpened her wits. They had, indeed, permanently stunted her purely intellectual development, but she felt with great intensity, and so often got to the truth. She knew of Captain Mirrilies' rupture with his wife without any telling, just as she was aware of his obstinacy in sticking to any course he had mapped out for himself.

That there must be some wisdom in any course chosen deliberately by Captain Mirrilies she knew, but she shuddered before the ruthlessness of his methods,—his obstinate refusal to pause and reconsider.—And oh ! the horrible anomaly of the whole position,—she didn't want him to pause and reconsider : and yet she wanted him to do right. She wanted to do right herself,—and yet, and yet——!

If he went doggedly forward, as he was going, such a vista of utter joy opened before Barbara's eyes as took her breath away, and glorified her being.

She could be free any day. There was no difficulty about that ! And Mary ?

Barbara knew too much of women not to be afraid for Mary. Mary did not love enough to be safe in the midst of temptation. Mary was practically no man's, and she was young and strong and vigorous. She was, moreover, consciously intelligent,—and thus open to all modern ideas. This Barbara felt rather than knew. Mary was an adventurer who so far had adventured nothing, and now alone, with adventure in the very air !

Young, untried, unprepared, immune from suffering, having touched none of the depths of life, except, perhaps, motherhood,—even in this Barbara had her doubts. Mary Mirrilies, to this woman who had suffered so much, seemed extraordinarily helpless and defenceless. In spite of all her knowledge, she knew nothing of anything, and now this man was looming large on her horizon.

It was Mary herself who had said that he was like Oliver.

Mrs. Dalton's correspondent had said most of the other things, and that she had come to the Station to injure Mary, Barbara was quite convinced. If one wanted damning evidence against Mary, there seemed to be plenty at hand. If things went on, if no force greater than all the rest came to dissipate the strength of those now at work, Oliver might also soon be free.

Barbara shuddered, and turned her frightened eyes back to Mary. Mary, the kind, spotless, aloof woman, who had been so good to her and so lenient. But, naturally enough, her eyes soon swerved back to herself.—This self so new and surprising that after all these unwanted years would at last be missed. She had made herself indispensable to Oliver Mirrilies. She had saved his life. She understood him. She loved him in a way Mary couldn't understand.

And yet Barbara's conscience would not let her alone. It hurt her unutterably to find that now the very name of Mary seemed to be jiggling about in a little vortex of disturbance. It had lost the sense of calm security in which Mary had always seemed to stand upright.

For some curious reason it had not yet struck Oliver Mirrilies to be disturbed, but that would come, and Barbara was wondering day and night if it ought not to come through her.

Oliver was anything but well. He could easily get leave. He ought to go to Mary. He ought to go !

In a week Barbara looked haggard and lean ; her old self accentuated. Being haunted by Mary had undone all the good of her short spell of happiness. She hated her conscience. She hated her revolt against it. She felt a double traitor, a traitor both to Oliver and to his wife, her first friends, the two who for years had made life possible to her at all.

She was a more ignoble traitor even than that. She was a traitor to the greatest thing upon earth, to her great love—the thing that had saved her. This,—dimly as her intelligence apprehended it, hurt Barbara the most.

The will to be good and the forces of Hell contending

against it, were fighting a hard battle just then in Barbara. She hated and despised herself, and yet she was silent.

And then Oliver came in one day with a hard, accusing face and all the cruelty of the outraged man laid bare, and the woman's chance was gone.

"You knew all this," he said. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Barbara cowered in her old terrible way..

"Don't do that," he said imperiously. His nerves were too strained to stand a woman looking like a whipped hound.

"Mary to be the talk of the Station!—under its breath too, damn them!—afraid to speak aloud about my wife! And you've known it—how long?"

"I've known nothing. There's not been one definite word."

"There have been a good many indefinite ones, then,—all over the place. And equally indefinite fears, no doubt, on the part of the anxious ladies sitting in conclave over our domestic affairs. Fears for Mary, all under their breath, at every tea-table in the Station! Good God! It's a new setting for Mary!"

"It's not like that at all," said Barbara at last, pulling herself together with an immense effort. "Mrs. Dalton, who doesn't know Mary, is the only woman in all India who would deliberately repeat things about her that could possibly make anyone anxious, and if they hadn't been about Mary, who is so much to us, and who is,—is—Mary—no one would have troubled at all about her little silly gossip. The things she repeated she heard from a friend at St. Moritz, and might have been said of any pretty woman at a big hotel. Mary is sure to have attracted great notice, and she told you herself—about the man who is so like you."

She paused. It was all so hopeless, so impossible. What she was saying was true, but it was not the truth—the truth she ought to be telling Oliver, and Oliver's face seemed to be killing her. She lowered her eyes before the hard, accusing mockery in his. She crossed her hands in her

old patient way, and all the sad old monotony was back in her voice.

"I detest Mrs. Dalton," she went on; "at the same time she said nothing really that matters,—if it weren't about Mary. But she said it with a purpose and I ought to have told you."

"You certainly ought. If I had known it a week ago, I should have gone home, and put an end for good to all these indefinite fears and hopes."

"But—but—" she said, and her eyes looked old and hunted, "can't you go now?"

"No. I've let Martin go instead."

Barbara was desperate. She had lost Oliver's chance for him, perhaps she had lost Mary's, and she was hopeless for herself. She was in the mood to say anything.

She lifted herself up from the old droop—back upon her now, with all the rest. She sat up straight and a little rigid, waiting for words to come. She could no longer choose them. She no longer cared to spare either Oliver or herself.

"If you'd told me a week ago," he muttered. "Good God! I ought to have known it without any telling. Mary the sport of women's damnable fears! Mary!"

"It's your own fault altogether," she said at last slowly. "Mary shouldn't be over there at all alone. I've known this ever so long. I've known other things! It wasn't the climate, or the Lectures, or little Oliver that prevented Mary coming back with you. It's an experiment you're trying, and it's a mad and wicked and wild experiment." She paused to steady herself, regardless of his amazed stare. "Mary is not fit for such experiments. She's a child."

"A child?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes, a child," she said inexorably, "without any experience of life at all."

"What can you know about it?" he demanded brutally.

"Oh! I know everything about it," she said, in a curious tone of weary finality.—"It was your business to

make her into a woman,—and such a woman ! I see Mary as a woman clearer than ever you've seen her," she said, turning her livid face to him,—“ it's knowing you that has made me know Mary,—and yet—and yet—” she cried passionately—“ I can't hate her.—That's Mary !—the child you sent away to make herself into a woman over there all by herself. Mary who knows nothing, or at least who knew nothing, either of herself or of women, when she went.—That's not a woman's business, not to say a child's. It's too big a job for any woman. It's a man's job, or they must do it together. Oh ! don't look as if you were being ashamed for me,” she said drearily. “ What does that matter ? I don't want to hide anything, or deny anything, and there's no time for shame. Think of all the years I have before me for that,” her voice suddenly broke loose, and rose into a little shrill shriek.

Oliver turned away his face.

“ Oh, let us keep to Mary,” she said, “ the child you sent out on a man's job.”

“ Do you know what you're saying ? ” he said in a hoarse, low voice.

“ Oh, yes,” she said, a look of age settling quietly down on her face, no older than Mary's. “ Oh, yes, I know, and I know it's the truth, and if I'd said it all a week ago, you would be now on your way home, and although I shall never forgive myself, you'll forgive me, for everything, and never despise me.—I'm safe in your hands, Oliver.—Any woman except Mary would be safe, and that's only because you thought her high above all women, the one exception, before she was a woman at all ! Before she had touched any of the common things of life at all, and couldn't possibly know any of the dangers of being a woman, and so take care of herself.”

Oliver tried to speak, but she waved his words away.

“ Men,—decent men,—men, I mean,” she said, “ who are forced when quite young into self-knowledge, are too hard. They expect too much from women who never even suspect what they are,—until they're tried. Oh ! men learn soon enough what they are, and so learn to beware of themselves.

It's part of their nature to know themselves, and part of women's not to. We've blinded ourselves so long, I think, that we've become blind. From the very beginning men have had to go out boldly to face things, while women have sat at home and pretended they didn't exist, till sometimes they believe it. Heaps of women get on quite well in life with half of them held down tightly under the heel of fear, or tradition, or ignorance, or religion,—feeling good in a curious, depressed way. If nothing happens they get stupefied, and end happily."

Her voice was low, impersonal, monotonous, as though it came from a far distance.

"I was crushing myself down into nothingness, refusing to let myself feel alive, when you and Mary found me.—I'm glad you found me.—I'm glad you found me," she said gently, "no matter what it costs."

For a second both were aware of a slight noise in the next room. Barbara paused, and held her breath, and listened warily, then, apparently satisfied that it meant nothing, she went on :

"Of course many women learn everything, all that love and life mean early, in the normal way, then they're safe anywhere,—real love is a woman's unfailing protector, and if a woman's love is great enough, and hurts enough," she said steadily, looking out into the distance, "it makes her want to protect other people, even from herself! If that fails, as it did just now with me, a woman can never forgive herself, however much a man may forgive her."

She paused, looking white and faint.

"Next to Mary," said Oliver, after a long pause, "you're the best woman I've ever known."

"I am also a fool, and all the goodness I have I've got from you. It's you who's made a woman of me. Any woman loving a man as I love you, must be good, even if it doesn't prevent her from being a fool. Please go now, Captain Mirrilies. If any man living can repair our folly,—it will be you. And will you please let me help you if I can?"

"If Major Quayle isn't back shall I drive you round to

the Darrells' dinner?" said Oliver, turning back from the verandah.

"Oh, no, you don't," said the mellifluous voice of the Major from his own doorway. "I'll drive her over myself."

"You back, Frank!—but I thought—"

"So did I; but I got off sooner than I expected, and came on by the early train. Didn't wire for the cart as Crave offered to drive me. I walked from the corner."

"Oh, well," said Mirrilies easily, "we'll soon meet again."

* * * * *

A horrible, slyly amused laugh she was beginning to distrust was on Major Quayle's face. She could feel him carefully choosing his words as he made inquiries as to the cause of her pallor.

"You looked as fresh as a daisy," he complained, "when I left home. Have a rest, and be fresh for to-night, while I go round for a game of Bridge. It's a big affair, I hear, and when a man has only just got used to seeing his wife growing younger every day, he doesn't want her to go back on him, and rob him of what's really the most stimulating experience in this dull hole. Better wear that blue thing you got from Paris."

He went off, whistling a lively air.

Barbara stood stock still, trembling.

"It was Frank I heard," she said at last. "He was in his room listening. I wonder how much he heard? No matter how little it was, however, he can use it for evil. Everything he touches he seems to corrupt."

"If—if only I weren't a coward, and afraid of him,—afraid to my very heart.—He can always paralyse me back into—what I was."

She tottered to a chair, and sat down to recover herself. Then presently, with every instinct of the hunted animal acutely alive in her, mutely, furtively, with frightened eyes she slunk round Quayle's room, examining every nook and corner for any trace of him.

Everything was as she had last seen it an hour ago. There was no trace of him anywhere: and yet he had been

there. She felt him there. He made her breathe all wrong. Then suddenly she paused and started. A little corner of a curtain was slightly displaced, an infinitesimal speck of red dust was on the matting.

"Ah! yes, he's been," she said, giving up the search, and standing quite still to get her breath again; "that's the dust of the Station Road."

"If only I could take opium and go to sleep," she said presently, tossing on her bed; "but my miserable head will stand nothing."

"He came in through the other door to listen,—he had been warned," she said, when she had rested a little, "and to be at the mercy of that man,—and to love the other!—God help the women who fail.

"And,—I've lost another chance. I haven't even the consolation,—the glory of having given up Oliver,—I haven't even that. It would have been something to hold on to when all the rest is gone——" Her face twitched, she seemed to shrink together.

"Oh, why couldn't I have cared for Oliver a little less and differently?—more like the others. Then I could have just rested, and let things go on."

Hours seemed to pass before she could think at all because of the pain in her heart, and then she said wearily, as though in reply to some counter-argument:

"Oh, yes. Oliver could love me in the end,—I'd nearly become indispensable to him. He could have loved me,—it seems incredible, but he could, and then—steal fire from Heaven, indeed!—I could have stolen Heaven itself for Oliver," she said, with fierce defiance, "and have overcome Hell!"

She hid her burning face in her hands, and when she lifted it at last she was steady and controlled again.

"And what I've got to do after all these heroics," she said, with a strange, low laugh, "is to do the best I can for all of us."

She sat still to think before calling her Ayah, whom she knew was being stealthily corrupted. "If I possibly can—if it's humanly possible at all," she said at last, "I'll prevent

Frank from making Oliver a co-respondent in his suit. That's what he wants to do."

"Did the Mem Sahib call?" said a voice at her elbow.

"No, Fatima, but she's quite ready for you. How very punctual you're getting. Have you been long here?"

"Even in this moment have I come."

Barbara felt so immensely alone, and she had done with so little all her life, that even the defection of the Ayah seemed to add to her desolation.

The longing for any crumb from any table came out in her spent voice, and the patient, unresentful, almost amused pleading in her eyes, was quite apparent to the guilty conscience of the little shrivelled woman. The one great passion left to the lean brown creature was the eternal passion for gold. She would sell her soul for gold, and was even then in the very act of doing it, but looking at the Mem Sahib made her feel uncomfortable.

There was a gentleness and an understanding in this Mem Sahib, who danced so little, and whom no man loved, that brought things to the memory of Fatima, things no woman could wish to remember when she has ceased to be a woman, but that will sometimes come. Small brown soft things about to die that had clung desperately to her aching breast—for she was of those whose fruit is doomed to wither ere yet it is ripe.—A husband young and comely who loved her tenderly and with great passion, until he knew that the children she bore him he would never keep,—all the hopes that had died so hard, and the despairs born of them that can never die.

The eyes of the Mem Sahib told her all those old things all over again, and set her standing in her youth once more with full breasts.

She suppressed a sepulchral groan or so, as, with her hypnotic touch, she brushed Barbara's hair, and Barbara knew without any groans at all, that the weak conscience of the woman had been bought by Frank, and that he was clever enough to make even native evidence count.

"And during Oliver's illness I only thought of Oliver," reflected Mrs. Quayle. "I may have been more foolish

even than I can remember now. Frank will leave no stone unturned. He wants to marry someone, I think, someone who will help him on,—I wonder who? And Fatima, who has suffered so much," she thought drearily, "to be ready to sell me for five pounds!—Frank wouldn't give a penny more.—I'd rather anyone else had done it. Women with a distinct family likeness shouldn't betray each other."

She looked back over the creature's history, every page of which she knew. She had often lived through the stolid, sordid, moving tragedy of the last scene as she listened to Fatima.

When all the negotiations for the new wife were complete and the other left behind, how the sobbing young husband had looked back from the brow of the hill for the last time, and when he vanished behind it, the little roundness still left to the breasts of the deserted wife had withered, and she was no more a woman.

Barbara had followed her at every step and she wondered greatly. They were to be sure very much alike!

But to be thinking of this now with Oliver to be saved! She pulled herself together and thought only of him, and the means of salvation at hand.

Barbara had already learnt the way to the soul of the native. Having herself been hunted so long she had learnt to hunt. She could slip as one to the manner born through all the devious approaches till the crouching live thing was tracked at last to its lair. And Fatima, without one direct word spoken, was presently convicted of her crime.

She trembled with a great awe. By the urge of the Higher Forces that destroy, the Mem Sahib had found her out.

She was clumsier than one could have believed possible in Fatima. She made strange mistakes. A mighty fear was upon her. Her children were crying in her ears. The Mem Sahib had undoubtedly bewitched her.

That night, as she sat before the wood fire at her hut-door,—for the chill of pain was in her bones,—she fell to considering many matters. Gold was a thing greatly to

be desired, but with a Mem Sahib who can thus bring back the dead, and take the truth out of your very heart, one must go softly.

The Mem Sahib had once also brought life into her dead heart and the power to weep. She could do all things for others and naught for herself, this Mem Sahib. She had found by divination the amount of the gold that had been given which none but Fatima herself and that other had looked upon. She had then taken from its scented box and laid out upon her lap that necklace of yellow stones, with witchcraft in them, that Fatima had desired for years. That necklace was greater than gold !

* * * * *

As Barbara furtively from under her muffler watched for the shadowy thing beside the fire, some hours later, as she and her husband were driving home, she knew that she had conquered.

“ So after losing the chance perhaps of his life for Oliver,” she thought, “ I’ve managed to brush a poisonous insect off him, and I have Fatima still. I can’t afford to lose even her—now.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. MIRRILIES, Senior, like many another resigned Christian, prided herself upon her consistency. In her closely-pruned, well-ordered mind, inconsistency, if it did not partake exactly of the nature of sin, was at least an indecorous anomaly, as much out of place in good society as discord.

Her habitation, like that of all women who count, was but an expression of herself.

It stood in the best part of the Cromwell Road, well balanced between the sordid quality of Earl's Court, and the vulgar noise of the Brompton Road. At the time her grandfather had bought it, it was still filled and inflated with an acutely irreproachable atmosphere. High dignitaries in all the great Professions lived in grave dignity in all the great grey houses in the immediate vicinity. It was an atmosphere sound to the core, and seemed to have reached concentration-point in the home of Mrs. Mirrilles' own people, a family of distinguished Lawyers. Her father and his father before him had been Judges in the High Courts.

Even an atmosphere light as thistledown has a tendency to return very frequently to torment. It will float wistfully round its old haunts, crooning softly over old follies often to the acute embarrassment of the present decorous owner of the premises. It will persist even for generations in its inconsequent intrusion. But weighted with the wisdom of the wise, and the pedantry of the learned, an atmosphere becomes practically Eternal. It will reverberate through the ages.

Mrs. Mirrilies had been born and bred in an atmosphere of this high calibre. It had become very part and parcel of her. Whithersoever she went, it went also. It had been to her as a trusty buckler, a sure house of defence. It had always,—no matter how steep and stony her path,—given her a sense of profound security, a coign of vantage, from whence herself unmoved, she could behold the moving scene.

From such elevated airs, mute and commentless, she could assimilate what belonged to her, and let the rest pass on.

This atmosphere that protected Mrs. Mirrilies became by judicious manipulation of shifting density. It illuminated with a cold pure light the essential, and plunged the unessential into decorous gloom.

In India, although at first forced by conscience to look the wickednesses more peculiar to her own order straight in the eye, warned by a thousand portents that wherever she looked she would behold iniquity she kept her eyes from henceforth fixed upon her husband, and refused to see anything else. *He* would tell her all that it was necessary for a woman to know. To emphasize such information would have been but an unworthy playing with fire.

Now back in the midst of the old atmosphere, undisturbed by travel, with the dust of ages upon its venerable tenants, it made the present live and palpitate with the glories of the past, and enabled Mrs. Mirrilies to see dimly, as from a far distance, anything she did not wish to see.

It sequestered and set her apart. Safely secluded in her big house of distinguished memories, she felt herself surrounded on all sides, as her father and her grandfather had been, by Admirals and Generals, Chief Justices and other distinguished persons, calmly ignoring the fact that she was now hemmed in by Flats and Boarding-houses, belching forth at stated hours pedestrians in waterproofs, and silk hats, betraying their callings severally by *attaché* cases, and little black bags.

Mrs. Mirrilies' detached eyes still beheld grave footmen,

and graver ladies and gentlemen, and a close line of carriages all down the street.

In no other atmosphere could she have recovered from Colonel Mirrilies and her suspicions of him, several of which, to give him his due, were unfounded. So, soothed and tranquillized in her shaded rooms, refusing to accept anything she could not approve, the atmosphere drew in about her and engulfed her.

And into this superfine environment Mary, and Oliver, and their very considerable following, broke buoyantly one sunny day in early Spring, and became very soon problems of the deepest dye to Mrs. Mirrilies.

Mary had changed, and for the better. She had lost her slight air of modern pedantry, poles apart from the fine classic spirit of the Past wherein she herself had been born and bred.

Mary had always been all that one could dare to hope for in a daughter-in-law,—the atmosphere in which Mrs. Mirrilies could alone breathe freely, discouraged wild enthusiasm. She had long accepted every blessing with a sigh.—Physically, Oliver could not have done better.—This was ungenerous!—Mary was more than all this!—but she sometimes thrust the world as it was upon the notice of Mrs. Mirrilies, Senior. This gave her curious scares, especially the first day that Mr. Peter Turton joined the group, apparently one of it.

The man unattached and inexplicable by the simple rule of three, was a dim sad memory to Mrs. Mirrilies. She had always hurried past him, the Atmosphere as a veil before her eyes. But Mr. Peter Turton had no notion of being hurried past, still less of being obscured by atmospheres.

He sat on in a leisurely way, looking painfully like Oliver, and laid himself out to be agreeable to her. Her fine remote face, slightly superhuman, interested him. It must have been a curious change for Captain Mirrilies to pass out of her hands into Mary's, who, after all, if anything but superhuman, could as yet hardly be called human.

Besides, having come up to town altogether against his better judgment, he wanted to make the most of his folly. Folly that falls flat being, to be sure, only fit for fools. So breaking through the atmosphere, Mr. Turton made himself quite apparent to Mrs. Mirrilies, and set her thinking as women who have not quietly put them aside and walked past them think of men and things. He thus became more comprehensible than the rest of dear Mary's friends, and more disturbing.

The Bishop of course needed no explanation. If Colonial, he was a man of family and character, to be accepted unconditionally. It was the others one could not reasonably be expected to grasp.

A woman who, at Miss Gaunt's age, could face the perils of matrimony, and at the same time bring a smile to light lips, seemed to Mrs. Mirrilies, an outrage upon the gravity both of age and of Institution.

Another who could aid and abet her, with all the sentiment of youth still unchecked in her, was equally inexplicable. They were welcome to her house as Mary's friends, but so far as she herself was concerned, must for ever remain without its doors. The two young men were no doubt necessary to the world's duration, and certainly interested Mary. She hoped at first there might have been some higher motive involving real self-sacrifice in Mary's frequent invitations, but there was nothing either in Mary's attitude or in theirs to foster this hope. They were heartily welcome to her house and to all it contained, but hardly to be accounted for *in* it. Fortunately the age of the young Russian Count protected Mary.

The sudden shock of finding him bent double devoutly kissing her hand, and the half-shuddering, half-pleasing anticipation of the renewal of the operation, kept him indeed vaguely roving upon the outskirts of her mind.

But neither the age of this new man nor anything else about him protected Mary, or would permit him to pass on unknown and unremembered.

There was a come-to-stay, persistent, solid look about Mr. Turton that appalled Mrs. Mirrilies so used to shadows.

He seemed to sit down with his quiet courteous smile so like Oliver's, and to make himself quite at home in her most intimate thoughts. Not that he was the least intrusive, he was much too like Oliver for that, but Mrs. Mirrilies was not used to men about her mind.

At the same time, that she was able to offer Mr. Peter Turton the hospitality not only of her house but of her thoughts, and that he was never out of place in either though in and out all day, spoke very highly indeed for the young man.

But if she at her age, and with her experience of men, could be thinking of Mr. Turton as she was thinking,—he was too like Oliver not to be thought about,—what about Mary?

In a carefully-selected, meticulously fine way Mrs. Mirrilies was becoming much disturbed in regard to Mary, and one evening, when Mary was out, true to old habit, she brought forth all her sad old songs and sang them to the listening ghosts.

Her sweet, worn voice lamenting in the twilight touched the little Moth to the quick. Except Peter, Miss Caldecott seemed to Mrs. Mirrilies as the most surprising feature in Mary's train. Why Mary should have chosen her as a friend she could not imagine, but being frail and delicate-looking and of irreproachable morals and family connections, Mrs. Mirrilies was most kind, and principles or not, insisted upon her drinking Port after dinner.

Mrs. Mirrilies rarely went back to the old songs. Their use was past, and her voice tired, but now as her indefinite fears for the future got mixed up with her very definite pain in the past, such tremulos of woe quivered out on the ghostly air that Miss Caldecott writing the family letter in her room just above the drawing-room thanked Heaven that Oliver was sound asleep.

"And the other Oliver," she murmured, "to have been brought up on that! And to have the nature of the man who could ever have made possible those awful

sounds in your very blood!"—thought Miss Caldecott, for one instant shutting her ears. But it was all too horribly fascinating, she very soon opened them again.

"Oh, I'm certain it's her husband," she said, breathlessly. "Nothing less would ever do it. And a man with a father like that must—must find life very difficult. Oh! I don't think Mary should have left him alone out there in the midst of temptations.—I'm sure she shouldn't."

She paused, shivering a little. She had never, in all her life, let herself think of such things, but now she felt as though they had been coming to a head in her for ever so long, and had to break out.

"And Mrs. Mirrilies who had a husband of this sort hasn't only *heard* of these awful things"—she sat with her pen pointed upward, rigid in her fingers. "If she didn't sing it all out," she muttered—"she'd die of it—and this is like listening at the door!"

"At the same time," she said, lowering her pen and primming her lips, "she's had quite enough of this unfortunate man for the present.—I could almost believe she's enjoying herself," she said after a pause. "She won't want me, but I'm better for her than any more of that."

Miss Caldecott's knees trembled under her as she went down the stairs.

By this time Mrs. Mirrilies was very much overwrought. She started and made a discord at the sight of the shadowy figure beside her.

"Oh! But I thought you were all out."

"I had letters to write so I stayed in. I've been listening to you this long time. I hope you don't mind," she said.

"No, indeed, if you care to listen to my faded voice. Once of course I used to like to sing to people, but now I only sing for myself."

"Your voice is very sweet, and true, and full of feeling."

"Ah, yes," she said, with a low laugh, "feeling is the one thing that time doesn't touch."

She rose, and began to collect her songs.

"Oh, please don't let me stop you," entreated Miss Caldecott.

"But I'm tired. It's quite time I stopped."

"Ah! You *are* tired," said Miss Caldecott, taking the music out of her hands, putting her down in an arm-chair, and with the gentle invincible determination with which she always took care of those who needed care,—caring for her. Mrs. Mirrilies slightly gasped, she could not have felt more surprised had a brown sparrow suddenly taken her under its wing, but the sensation was not an unpleasant one.

The songs had racked her to the marrow of her bones, and the old dim room was full of sadness, and it was Mary, her son's wife, who had made her open again the old songs.

She was in a strange mood not averse to the ministrations of moths.

Miss Caldecott, her task completed, took out her knitting, a little silk sock for Oliver, and quietly waited, and presently to her own immense surprise, Mrs. Mirrilies, who until now had invariably sung her thoughts, found herself speaking them.

They were disjointed, indefinite thoughts and all about Mary. Her eager, abounding life, her clear young eyes, her rounding figure.—"Such a very strange variety in her friends," said Mrs. Mirrilies, with delicate hesitation, "and the absolute confidence of all her friends in Mary."

Mrs. Mirrilies was evidently proud of this fact, but there was a slight quiver in her voice.

"But it wasn't Mary surely who made you sing like that just now," inquired Miss Caldecott, slightly pausing on a needle.

Mrs. Mirrilies started. What had she been saying? Had she said too much?—The first thought of any woman with a silent grief long since merged in her pride, and adding daily to the sum of it.

And yet in her strange mood under the moon's rays, so aloof from a chattering world, her one listener so shadowy herself as to remind her of her own family,—it

was almost like speaking to the blessed dead,—a monologue of shadows! In this case surely one may speak out without indelicacy.

So leaning back in her arm chair, her slender feet on the stool, where the little Moth had deposited them, with a gentle smile, she spoke out about Mary, honestly, kindly, and with a good deal of commonsense for one so used to ghosts. And then, almost in spite of herself, but with a sense of unutterable relief, she divulged Colonel Mirrilies. As she went on in a curious way he seemed to become bowdlerized. She spoke very gently, softly, tolerantly, just as a painstaking Recording Angel might have done, and with the same conscientious thoroughness. More than once Miss Caldecott dropped her knitting, blushed and squirmed. She was immensely sorry for all wives, and a little in love with Colonel Mirrilies.

"And your son?" she stammered at last. "Has he escaped every trace of his father?"

"I am thankful to say he has not, my dear Miss Caldecott," said the Colonel's widow, bridling. "My husband was an extremely handsome, well set-up man of great ability. My son has inherited all this. His soul, thank God, is mine."

"Oh," said Miss Caldecott only partially reassured. Since her real friendship with the boys had set in, she had found that in male creatures souls and bodies have a most disturbing way of getting inextricably mixed up.

"Did you tell all this to Mary?" she asked anxiously.

"To my daughter-in-law?" she cried, staring with horror at the Shadow. "But, dear Miss Caldecott, how could I?"

"I wonder if Captain Mirrilies may perhaps have done so?"

Beholding the Shadow as from a far distance, Mrs. Mirrilies lifted a proud head.

"Hardly, Miss Caldecott. Oliver loved his father, as indeed did the whole Regiment."

"He must have been an unusually attractive man," said the Moth, thinking with deep anxiety of his son.

"Ah," said Mrs. Mirrilies with carefully guarded face, bearing and voice. "There could be no second opinion about that.—Shall we turn on the lights, dear Miss Caldecott?"

"Ah, not yet, please. It's so delightful as it is. I love Mary very much, Mrs. Mirrilies," she said simply. "Will you tell me about her husband when he was a child? I've seen his photograph and Mary's told me things, but no one but a Mother can show another woman her child just as he was, and Mothers don't mind, do they?—I've not been impertinent, have I?" she said suddenly, hot all over at what she took to be a cold glance.

It was really the momentary hesitation of a proud woman unused to emotional adventure.

"I shouldn't have taken impertinence to be your besetting sin, dear Miss Caldecott," she said with her gracious smile, "and I like to show you my little son, now six feet two."

So presently Miss Caldecott knew as much about Oliver the Greater as she did about Oliver the Less. She knew as much as any woman who hasn't borne him can know about a child. She also knew a good deal, for a diffident spinster, of the father of Oliver. She knew more than was good for her, perhaps, for it kept her awake all night!

But Mrs. Mirrilies slept well. Her heart was relieved of a great burden, and she had found a friend amongst the shadows who brought her good dreams.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE inviolable confidence of a man who has suffered from a bad woman, in a good one, is not always an unmixed ethical advantage to either side.

Had Mr. Peter Turton not cherished so profound a belief in the invincible strength and intelligence of Mary Mirrilles, her practical immunity indeed from the temptations that usually beset women, he might not have responded with such indecent haste to the first chance of being near her. And now the unusual capacity of Mrs. Mirrilles for throwing open unexpected doors in her friends, whilst keeping all her own carefully locked, made her increasingly and peculiarly attractive to Peter Turton.

This keeping of her doors shut arose—he felt certain—from no churlish inhospitality upon her part. The master key had not yet come into her possession, that was all, or much more probably she had not yet learnt its use.

Everyone indeed who came near Mrs. Mirrilles was at his best. His faculties all alert, alive and expectant. One must find out all about her, and it would be all good, a big gain for the explorer. What added appreciably to her attraction was this curious fact, that having herself as yet no experience that really counted, her own eyes and those of her observers were largely riveted upon her future.

In spite of husband and child and the wild worlds of theory she must have traversed, there was all the haunting lure of an unexplored continent about Mrs. Mirrilles.

It was impossible to think about Mrs. Mirrilles without thinking about her husband. Peter Turton thought

about him a good deal, but this only intensified the rare and special attraction of his wife,—this baffler of men.

The situation was settling down into a peculiar and paradoxical one.

It was as safe for Mrs. Mirrilies as for him. Peter was only too sure of that. And yet it wasn't fair. It wasn't fair on Mirrilies, or on Mrs. Mirrilies or on himself, and safe or not, there was danger ahead for all of them.

Mrs. Mirrilies could have no capacity for adventure except of the most transcendent and ethereal nature, Mirrilies was probably as reckless a theorist as his wife, in a world as yet unfit for theorists. Possibly Mirrilies knew what he was about. He had been too much of a fool himself in a thousand ways, to judge any man off hand, but he knew what rank bad luck meant, so far as high-falutin dreams went. He knew their value.

Moreover no man knows when the moment in which one is no longer safe, may come. It may be the next for all one suspects.

If Mirrilies after all was a fool, it wasn't for him, who had plumbed the depths of folly, to follow his lead. It might also be the next minute for Mrs. Mirrilies. Concerning that matter no mortal could venture to prophesy. And he loved her. He knew this now. He loved her as those men who love once and for ever love. He loved her too much to hurt her.

The only straight thing was to go. To cut himself clean out of her life, and make the best of what was left of his own without her. He would wait for the wedding and then he would go.

He would leave everything to his steward for months to come, and decide where to go at the last moment. He had invitations and schemes to exploit all over the world, he had only to choose. As for kit, he had cupboards of it to fit any expedition. There need be no delay, he thought grimly, and what he had to do had to be done quickly.

And then talking one day at his Club to a friend, a friend of the first man's came up who started when he

saw Turton, and came over later to talk to him. He knew Captain Mirrilies it seemed, and was struck with the likeness between the men, and when Turton said that he knew Mrs. Mirrilies he looked rather surprised. He came over again to talk to him, and the two men dined together.

"Do you know Mrs. Mirrilies well?" the man asked as soon as they were alone after dinner.

"Very well," said Turton. "I saw a lot of her abroad, and I see her pretty often now at her mother-in-law's."

"Have you seen her very lately? To-day for instance?" he persisted.

Turton looked slightly surprised but answered readily.

"I saw both the Mrs. Mirrilies' this morning."

"I don't understand in the least then. The mail came yesterday; she must have got her letters. Oh, well there's no breach of confidence in it. You can't hide such things under a napkin. It'll be all over the place soon and why she hasn't heard is beyond me.—You'd know if she'd had bad news?"

"I think I should.—Yes, I should certainly."

"The whole thing is a mystery to all of us. We all thought Mirrilies as straight as a die, and devoted to his wife, and she to him, and now a fellow called Quayle, a bad hat, and the devil himself for cleverness, has cited him as co-respondent in a suit. Quayle is far too cunning a brute to do it unless he had evidence,—and the woman's a good little woman we all thought, when we thought of her at all. No one ever did except now and then to be sorry she had Quayle for a husband, and was too feeble to resist his bullying. Everything went against her. Her babies died off one after the other. For the rest, she was about the safest woman in India—Good God! when one thinks of her, drab, insignificant. I hear she's bucked up lately,—but Mrs. Quayle and Mrs. Mirrilies!"

"Are you sure of this?"

"Certain, or I shouldn't have spoken of it. Mrs. Mirrilies must know it by the next mail, and then God help her! I've never regretted anything more,—for her

sake and Mirrilies' and my own. I hate to be mistaken in an old friend,—if indeed I am. The mistake may be on the part of that bounder Quayle.—It's India and damned propinquity, if there's any truth in it. Mrs. Mirrilies had no right to leave a man like Mirrilies alone over there. She was always a bit too learned to have much sense. Her mind was lifted far above the common needs of common men. It's a bad business all round."

"Why did no one warn her?"

"Warn Mrs. Mirrilies! We were all a little afraid of Mrs. Mirrilies and rather on our *p*'s and *q*'s in her presence, you see. There wasn't one of us but would have funk'd the job."

Turton slightly smiled. He understood in a measure.

"And Mrs. Quayle, if you could see her! Mrs. Grundy herself couldn't have a word to say about the poor little woman. She nursed him in some damned sickness, that was it, if there is any truth in it at all, a lonely man in India can make a pretty big fool of himself if he's put to it. Mrs. Mirrilies shouldn't have left him. We'll owe her a grudge for the rest of our lives. Mirrilies can't be spared and this will ruin him, root and branch. He'll have to go. He stood out too markedly against the rest of us."

Turton left as soon as he could. It worked like a ferment in his blood. It kept him awake all night. It changed everything. It changed even himself fundamentally.

With this new knowledge he would not go. His love and pity rose to illimitable heights. All the restrained passion of a score of barren years were escaping from the control of a strong will.

Mirrilies no longer stood between them. Mary was free, practically, and above all women in the world she would need help and protection. She would need all a man could give her. In such a strait women and boys were of no avail.

Like one in a dream he went to and fro in his room until the dawn broke, resolved to call directly after luncheon. . . .

Miss Gaunt was meanwhile very busy getting country clothes. From the beginning she had put down her foot upon any mention of the word *trousseau*. Robert was much too great and fine, to be made ridiculous by ribald wit. She was not too busy, however, not to keep watchful eyes upon Mary and her general effects.

The Bishop being mere man maintained, in this regard, his usual high level of calm.

Naturally she only loved Robert all the more for his folly, but she could have whipped Mary. "She's a wandering fire," said Miss Gaunt, "and she'll burn someone to the bone before she's done." She patiently turned a hat back to front, and from side to side, to try to look less ugly under its smart upturned brim.

She spoke presumably to Cousin Ella who sat resignedly in an arm-chair being surprised at Julia, but she was hardly conscious of her audience at all really. She spoke to relieve the tension of her feelings.

"It cost two pounds ten," said Miss Gaunt, "and just look at me!—And what does it matter with Mary riding for a fall?"

"All the same," she sighed. "I wish Robert was near sighted instead of long. Oh, well, thank God, he's a rank idealist. Mary and I both prove that. I wonder if he'd be quite so sky-high in his judgments if she weren't as attractive as she is, and in her irritating way, getting worse every day.—Oh! It's not the hat, it's me! I thought I'd got over hating my ugliness, but Robert's brought it all back, that, and a dozen other superannuated sins. To overcome some sins one must be past sinning, I suppose. I'm glad at least I haven't yet reached that stage, the last refuge of the destitute."

"Oh, my dear Julia, don't!"

"I wish you'd turn your deaf ear directly I begin to forget my manners and say what I mean, Ella. Then you could be edified, and watch the new clothes at the same time."

Cousin Ella relapsed into a thoughtful silence, and to her great discomfort Miss Gaunt discerned moisture in her innocent eyes.

She talked undiluted clothes for a minute or so, and the small domestic concerns of their future Vicarage, but Cousin Ella having primed herself to the effort, it must be made.

"Julia!" she quavered, "I've had what was called beauty, and yet you've got more in the end than I have, dear," she said wistfully, "and now could you forget everything but being happy. It would be very beautiful, don't you think? It's what Robert does, and it makes us all so happy and,—and so safe. To have to be thinking that it is your duty to be afraid for Mary, when you have always only been just proud of her, is so very difficult."

Her pretty weak lips all scored with little lines were trembling.

Miss Gaunt dropped her hat and gasped.

"Goodness gracious!" she said. "So this is what comes of funk and grousing. I've been undermining Mary's character, it seems, and nearly worried you into doing the same. Whenever your conscience has ventured to assert itself, Ella, it's always proved itself of finer quality than mine. It's given me some well-deserved knocks in its time. Somehow, Ella, I think that you should have been the governess and I the pupil."

"My dearest!" cried the pupil all aghast.

Miss Gaunt laughed.

"You're right, Ella. It would never have done. We'd have reversed the positions in a week."

"And think," said Cousin Ella, "of the comfort it's been to both of us, that in our dear life together in any little difference of opinion, you've almost invariably been right and I wrong."

Somewhat to Cousin Ella's bewilderment, Miss Gaunt's fine laugh rolled through the room.

"Ella, you don't know how delightful you can be. You've never known it. If you had, others besides you would have found it out, and carried you off, and left me desolate."

"No," she said gently, "never anyone else after Henry.

And in any case wherever I went you would have gone also."

"Like Ruth of old. Well,—I do think that women, even the women who've never been finished and never will be now,—not here at any rate, know what friendship means. And oh, Ella,—even if one of us has lost everything in the great venture, I'm glad we've both staked our all. We've stood at any rate in the outer courts of the Temple, you and I,—and seen little gleams of the glory through the chinks. If we hadn't, we shouldn't have loved each other so well or understood,—oh—anything. The boys would have been sealed books to us, and Oliver, and Mr. Turton, and those fine sinners up at St. Moritz. We'd have seen them all through our own miserable little experiences."

"But, dear Julia," said Cousin Ella with a scared face, "that's just how I see them now. I don't really understand them in the least, but I love them all. And I did enjoy looking at those very interesting people with histories. And after all, dear, I didn't understand enough about them to condemn them which really was rather a blessing, don't you think?"

"It was a great blessing Ella, a blessing Providence doesn't as a rule shed with a very free hand on the inexperienced. But if you don't understand the boys and the others, my dear, you understand Mary it seems better than I do, and it's Mary who matters. Mary and the two Olivers. And—after all these years that I can look at you from a brand new point of view is really rather invigorating. We're on the 'count-all-your-blessings' tack to-day, so just enter that among them. The fact that we've never bored each other for more than five minutes at a time in all these years, considering all things," said Miss Gaunt with a cryptic grin, "is very remarkable, and undoubtedly a blessing."

She returned with a slight sigh to her hat.

"You're sure you'd like me to do everything about your cottage before you come?" she said presently.

"But of course I should, dear. You've always done

everything about things. It wouldn't be like my own cottage at all unless you'd arranged it all."

Miss Gaunt smiled rather tenderly for her, as she patted a bow.

"What a wife for a selfish man," she reflected grimly. "Henry Gray was the most selfish man in a world of them I ever struck. He lost more than he ever suspected."

Mary on her part, used to watch her old dears paddling on the shores of life, and looking out over the great seas they would never sail. And yet she who had sailed all the seas didn't seem to be much the wiser for her voyages, and she was infinitely more alone. They had each other and the Bishop. She had nothing that belonged to her really but Oliver the Less, and Oliver grew dearer every day and less satisfying. Her heart seemed too big to be filled by one little child. It ached with emptiness, and the gulf widened, and the dividing waters deepened, and the hand of Oliver—the builder of bridges,—seemed to have lost its cunning.

Mary was beginning to watch for the coming of Peter Turton. He had chosen loneliness for ten years. He must know something about it. That he also knew something about everything that baffled her, was a firm and growing conviction in her mind.

He could interpret Oliver to her. What Oliver wanted, and why he no longer wanted her.

The folly of desperation working in a woman makes hay of her constructive faculties. To take the matter into her own hands, and herself turn bridge-builder did indeed enter more than once into Mary's mind, but she always recoiled chilled and shivering from her own incompetence, her own insufficiency. She had no more to give to Oliver now than she had when she left him; no more vital an understanding of Oliver's needs. She was indeed now ready at last to put self aside once and for all, and to make for the truth, and should it, after all, be Oliver's truth and not hers, what did it matter? What did anything matter any more for her but to be one with Oliver?

And yet whenever she dared to face all the aspects of the old life, the same sense of non-comprehension, the same deep-seated repulsion, the same amazed wonder at Oliver still possessed her.

The only difference was that she no longer hugged her own point of view, and condemned Oliver's. To merge all differences and to be one indissolubly with Oliver was her one desire, and in some wild way Peter Turton was to be the stepping-stone to this mystic union.

The attitude of Mrs. Mirrilies towards Peter Turton brought out many quite unexpectedly charming qualities in her. It made her extraordinarily attractive to him, —it disarmed serious criticism. The natural apprehensions of Mrs. Mirrilies the elder, yielded at last to Mary's frank spontaneous friendship for Mr. Turton. It was obviously as innocent as her feeling for the boys.

"Mary," reflected her mother-in-law with some sagacity and not a little pride, "is as safe, thank God, as I should have been myself."

Of the ultimate issue for Mr. Turton she felt a less assured conviction. But here she primmed her lips. "That is Mr. Turton's affair," she said.

In a kind Christian way Mrs. Mirrilies liked men to suffer for their sins.

* * * * *

And so it had gone on. The two with half-humorous, half-serious and purposeful persistence kept on lightly playing with fire.

The purpose in Mary's play was so sincere that fire seemed to have transcended its own nature. In its elevation to a higher plane it had felt the warmth of its own heart, and could now only spare and protect.

Even the boys were satisfied. Peter Turton was now one of them; no longer suspect, a mere partner in woe. They now felt for him as they felt for one another.

As the wedding drew near Nature overcame common-sense even in Miss Gaunt's case. Her attention frequently now sheered off from Mary, and became riveted upon

her own affairs. They were complicated, and called for all her wit and wisdom. It was no easy matter to make an enterprise such as she had let herself and Robert in for only just ridiculous enough to evoke honest laughter, and turn it into an occasion of real enjoyment for her friends.

Thus it was that Mary had a free hand and played great games with her unknown element. She was insufferably unhappy, and the hag-ridden sense of the ineffectuality of the woman who stands alone, was undermining her proud spirit.

She stood like a ghost beside her old self, and wondered at her hampering loneliness. She remembered, as in a dream of some past life, her old happy self-reliance, her profound belief in the rectitude of all her attitudes towards Life—her gentle aloof condemnation of all she could not understand.

The uplifting sense of being all-sufficient unto herself, will enable a woman to upset the Universe. That withdrawn or in abeyance, she is capable of being scared by a mouse.

Mary stood passive in a maze of obstacles of which she knew nothing, which moreover no woman could face alone. With all her knowledge that was all she knew now for a certainty. Her sex could carry her no farther. She had lost faith in herself, and waited and watched for Peter Turton. Not easily and happily now any more, but with a weary ache and a curious sense of inevitableness.

Mrs. Mirrilies the elder, in her aloof stately way, now also waited for Peter. He brought in the adult world, so tactfully and in so reassuring and inspiring a fashion that she was preparing herself even to reorganize certain of her theories in regard to it, should she find that they needed reorganization. She had always prided herself upon her breadth of mind.

She was now listening to Mr. Turton retailing the effect of mixed farming upon a rural population. For still in a dream, Peter had called immediately after luncheon, and in a dream he was now talking to Mrs. Mirrilies and watching Mary, who it was plain knew nothing yet.

CHAPTER XXX

" **M**Y dear Mr. Turton," said Mrs. Mirrilles, with her kindest smile, " you've turned the life and death of a turnip into a fairy tale. You must be a great power for good in your neighbourhood. In my recollection of the country the rural population was rarely interested in anything but its food and drink, and a rise in wages."

" But after all we're all out for our own aims, and to turn things to our own advantage. Even turnips don't appeal to you unless you can get them to do their best for you, and to make them do that, you've got to find out all their good points, and to get the better of their bad. To get hold of the life in them you know and to turn it to your own purposes. There's life in everything, after all, even in turnips and the rural population."

" But doesn't it bore you ? "

" We haven't time to be bored with each other. You see it doesn't do to limit your horizon to turnips, and to see nothing else. We've got the land under every crop that grows, and no one can complain of any want of variety in our beasts. When I got the place it was all under grass, and we all thought fat cattle, and were bored to extinction. Now we go to the ends of the earth after fodder and seed. With your eyes and the rural population's on dozens of things living different lives and needing different treatment, there's no time for anything but differences of opinion. We can't find room for our experiments. Half the park is cut up into allotments, each telling its own story, week by week, like the serials

in the halfpenny papers, and there's not a child in the village but can read the stories."

"But," cried Mrs. Mirrilies, aghast. "The park!"

"Oh, the deer have plenty of room, and we've got a new kind of white goat, that looks rather picturesque among them. One has to consider the shades of one's ancestors you know, and there's a big stretch of moorland that no one in his senses would touch, and glades with nothing more productive than scrubby wild white roses. And I like to see the villagers cruising round on Sundays and holidays looking at the results of their work, and squabbling over theories. If we look like falling back into the sleep of centuries, someone starts the idea of a new crop, and we're all alive again. And two agricultural papers of violently opposed views help by violent contention to keep up the spirit of good fellowship at the Pub."

"The boys say that you give all your people a share in the harvests," said Mrs. Mirrilies.

"Of course I do. Otherwise the harvests would suffer. The usual thing—selfishness."

"I think it's seeing life living itself in other people's ways," said Mary.

"But they're all so extraordinarily alike. It's hard to say where theirs begins and yours ends. You never get lonely tracking life, you meet yourself at every turn, even in beasts and beings you'd rather not own up to, but they're close kin all the same. There's only one life after all, all the difference is in the way you live it. Saints and sinners are all blood brothers, but they all have a constitutional objection to poor relations."

"It's all very well," protested Mary, laughing and restive, "but we can't be all mixed farmers."

"But we can admit the truth of a theory without wanting to prove it. To believe in life for all one's worth is the secret of a farmer's success, just as it's the secret of all success, I believe. Being afraid of life is only another name for failure."

"Dear me!" burst out Mary. "As if anyone was

ever afraid of a tangible object. But suppose you don't know what you're afraid of?"

"In the case of negatives you can always switch on the electric light. Bogies hate the light."

"The hay that life has made with the world rather weakens one's confidence in it, don't you think?" said Mary tentatively.

"But isn't the boot on the other leg? Isn't it the world that's made hay of life?" inquired Peter.

"My dear Mr. Turton," said Mrs. Mirrilies the elder, with prim apprehension, "I believe your theories to be revolutionary, and dangerous. And," she paused and lifted her eyes as full of pain as though they pleaded for the life of her dearest friend, "where then does original sin come in?"

"Very early in the day I should say," said Peter. "The next man after Adam who made a fool of himself, couldn't always be blaming the woman,—the thorns and the thistles of a wild world had taught him that much anyway,—and as a man must have something to blame, he invented original sin."

"Dear Mr. Turton, don't be flippant. Were life all good the world would be very different."

"I admit the state of the world, Mrs. Mirrilies—to the naked eye—but I'll stick to my guns. I feel sure that life is as right as rain. May I pull up the blinds and let in the sun," said Peter with gentle audacity.

Mary looked radiant. Never yet had she seen the sun in that handsome sombre room.

Mrs. Mirrilies paused, flushing painfully. It seemed almost sacrilege that a room which had seen so much sorrow, that had endured life so long under the hushing hands of resignation, should be flooded with April sun, but Mary's face compelled her.

"Certainly, Mr. Turton. Draw up the blinds."

"I've just seen the Bishop and Miss Gaunt," he said when he had obeyed her to the full, and the young sun was rollicking through the chaste gloom. "They were sitting on two chairs in the Park, hatching plots for re-

capturing village sheep that had gone astray, in flocks it seems,—it's an evil little village, I gather, its principal industry poaching, by bringing back a flavour of the wild into the fold. The Bishop knows the breed. No one living who saw the two and felt the sun could believe in original sin. Keep it till November, Mrs. Mirrilies. Then one can give it a fairer hearing. Original sin isn't for April."

Mary looked very pretty and perturbed. Peter Turton was perturbed also. He wanted to be saying a thousand such very different things to Mary, for the sun of Spring was in his veins.

" My belief in original sin, Mr. Turton, doesn't, alas! depend on the seasons. It is part and parcel of my Faith."

" Let me telephone for the car, Mrs. Mirrilies, and drive you down to Richmond. You'll forget original sin in the park.—If it's true, it's true, and you'll find it again in the dull days. Meanwhile it will be quite happy waiting in the shade, and be a sort of comfort, don't you think, to the floating spirit population that lurks there."

" You're very kind, Mr. Turton," she said with the smile that always made Peter certain that in spite of everything Colonel Mirrilies liked her to the end. " I should like very much to go with you, but my throat is rather bad to-day. I'm better at home. I am sure, however, that my daughter would like to go."

" I should love it," said Mary.

" Where's Oliver, then, and Miss Caldecott? There's plenty of room. I'll drive myself."

" Oh!" cried Mary. " How provoking! He's spending the day in the Zoo with Cousin Ella and Miss Caldecott."

" Well, we can pick them up."

" Oh, but I don't think Cousin Ella would like it. It's her day. She wouldn't even take me."

A score of old shynesses, little quavers of vague fear she had almost forgotten came running back to Mrs. Mirrilies' senses as she looked at Mary. Mary looked so very pretty, but the sun in the room somehow compelled

confidence. She hurried the prejudices back to their ancestral burrows and smiled at Mary,—as safe as she was herself, thank God!

"Oh, well, dear. We can't spoil Cousin Ella's day, and Oliver will be in good hands. Don't lose any of this lovely afternoon, but put on your furs. We mustn't forget it's April."

No one could forget that it was April. All down Cromwell Road even April sang songs in the air. Gleams of burgeoning trees flashed through the openings, young verdure from every tiny plot proclaimed the fact. All the gardens farther on were sweet with April crying her wares, and crooning over her promises. She was written on the willows by the water side, in letters of luminous gold, and deep in the hearts of the two friends she stirred, asking strange questions.

A haze frosted with crushed opal like a dove's breast hovered above the river, and the young green buds of the bushes seemed to twinkle in its strange lucency. Faint fingers of saffron and rose and lavender spread out beckoning upon the horizon, foreshadowed the quality of the sunset with which the West was preparing to rejoice the world. Things seemed to vie the one with the other in claiming kin with creatures. They came close—closer—they touched at points. There was a mystic joy as of unification, on earth, in sky and water. The one great Heart was becoming almost audible.

Mary had no words. She was holding her breath to listen. Nothing seemed impossible this wonderful day, and it was all good. How the next hour went Mary never knew.

They ate maids of honour, she and Peter Turton, and drank tea, somewhere under the trees in Paradise. So far as she could remember they said nothing. Words would have disturbed the peace, besides they were no longer necessary. The whole world was understanding things together and coming nearer.

In the park all the birds in the universe seemed to be singing. And the deer with bright, brooding eyes

stood still to pause and understand, to take part in the great coming home, the meeting at last, of the divided kin. It was the moment of the whole world and she was in it. The sense of passionate elation in Mary was so intense that it burnt her like a red flame.

And then she knew. Suddenly she knew that she no longer wanted Oliver. For a second she was pierced by an utterly unprecedented pain. Some warning seemed to have broken into the enveloping radiance of assured joy. Not the ridiculous little pleasant sense of contentment of every day, but some huge cosmic thing.

For this one strange moment of check and pause and question, the amazing joy dwindled. It lost in size and consequence, and Mary was back again upon a cramped and difficult earth, separated from all the things in which she had been revelling. The old loneliness was upon her. She wanted human help again.—She whose spirit had just been set free in Infinity was a beggar again, craving for help !

Still dazed with her vision of limitless power, still with the beating of the great Heart in her ears, she turned in a sort of helpless resentment to Peter Turton. She had forgotten him as a person. He had been part of it, understanding it all, living it. Now he was Peter Turton pure and simple, and he stood between her and her eerie rapture.

As she looked, his face gripped her. It was reassuring in its strength and gravity.

They were going leisurely through some wood. The sunlight sifted in and out of the leaves. The birds sang under their breath. There was a hush as of lonely places about them, and all the colours of all the flowers were gathering in the West.

“ It must be late,” she thought languidly, “ and where were they ? Surely not in the park now ? She tried to remember what they had passed,—some old landmark. But her memory seemed to be all blurred. And—what did it matter ?

In her strange intensity of feeling she was only really conscious of Peter’s face. It was steadyng itself, holding

itself still. She could see that. It had lost all its careless good-humour.

It was very reassuring really, but it frightened her.

An impulse to ask him to stop, and turn, and take her home made her want to stretch out a detaining hand and lay it on his, and suddenly she found she couldn't.—It was all so utterly ridiculous! She tried to think it out. There was nothing unusual really in anything.

She had been too happy, perhaps. It was that.—The beauty of the day, the singing of the birds, the sense of power, and the wild freedom had always been part of Spring,—the warmth from some fire smouldering always in the heart of Spring,—but this time it had burst into flame.

Again she looked at the earnest face that had now gained complete mastery over itself.

Neither the glory nor its sudden cessation had anything to do with Peter Turton,—a hot flush as inexplicable as all the rest, flooded her face.

It was—what had to come. What had come always of late to everything. Things had always ended just as she seemed to be getting into them. She wondered half-scared if it would always be like this.

It would be too ridiculous to ask him to let her go back by train,—to go home at once. How could she possibly explain her sudden change of mind?

Suddenly an overwhelming revolt against her loneliness, her helplessness seemed to possess her. Her baffled efforts and desires rose up before her like some barrier. Nothing seemed to happen as she hoped it would. The revelations she had expected from the Lectures,—from the boys,—had all come to nought. Even Oliver,—yes, even Oliver had failed her!

She had no right to feel so alone and lost and bereaved. She had everything, and her right in everything. Not ten minutes before she had been revelling in pure joy, and it was her native element. And now to be shivering with cold on the shore of the great warm sea that was hers for the plunge was no place for such as she was,—such as she

now knew herself all at once to be. She could no longer stand outside things and alone, since she was one with them, and knew it. She no longer longed for the moon. The moon was cold and far away.

She wanted the fullness of the sunshine upon her, and to live at full pitch as every leaf and flower and blade of grass lived, and the deer and the birds.

She sighed with the wild effort to recapture her lost joy, and in the end it came running and leaping into her veins. Her brain was afire with it.

And then, with curious suddenness, it changed in quality. It no longer stimulated and uplifted and filled her with a gay courage, a desire for some infinite enterprise. It no longer ran and leapt like flame. It slid, soft and alluring, like a caress, through all her veins. It wrapped her round, and enclosed her in a lovely peace, all full of easy happiness. It no longer looked out, eager and triumphant, at the world opening its heart to her.

Not an hour before she could not imagine herself without the world, or the world without her.

Her desires had narrowed, it would seem.—Now the world was too big for her, too full of demand, and only she herself was of supreme importance. She was the burning centre of her own life.

The shadows were lengthening on the edges of the wood. The bewitching, bewildering scent of young growth slid out from the dim mystery of hidden glades, drawing the man and woman irresistibly into the green world of secret things.

When Peter Turton pulled up the car and got out, Mary followed him as simply as the children followed the Pied Piper. There was nothing else to do. Everything was now inevitable.

The amazing silent walk into the confused beauty of the twilight depths shot through with glints of saffron, as they went down the green path to the West, had all been from the beginning.

Not till long afterwards did either of the two remember at which moment they had taken each other's hands and

held them warm and close. There was nothing to remember then. It was all quite simple and natural. The only thing to do.

They were going together to the heart of life, not of the world's life, that was far away out on its own business, but to the heart of their own life, the only life that now throbbed and called to them.

" You know I love you ? " he said at last.

" Yes," she said, as a child might in a dream. " I—I suppose it's that."

" And you ? " he asked, stooping to her.

His eyes kept her silent, struggling to think. Afterwards, when she had gathered her senses about her again, and could think, she knew that all of which she had been aware was some great and irreparable loss that must be made good, and her own strange dependence upon Peter Turton: her confiding hope in him. This had come upon her with a strength that seemed to shake her. That was why she trembled and her breath came in gasps as she said almost inaudibly, " I don't know,—I don't know."

He was holding her now,—looking into her face,—and he made it hot. That, too, she knew,—afterwards, and all the time she trembled and shook, and it was all inevitable.

" Mirrilies is a man,—and not a fool; he must have known what he was about sending you out alone——"

He was hissing it into her ears and holding her tight. She looked up at him with helpless protest. She tried to free herself, but she felt too curiously weak, and—and—she didn't want to be free.

This was the first time since she had set out on her wild walk that Mary knew definitely that she did not want to be free. It was the first note in her awakening, perhaps.

She still, however, stood passive in Peter Turton's hands in a passion of expectation.

" You were a girl—a child, and not a woman——" he hissed, wildly, justifying himself.—This man who had, so far, done violence to no living creature but himself must of necessity justify himself.—" He threw you into a world too strong for children—with growth to reckon with. With

all that to come. With all the dangers of which he knew everything in your path. You—you had no defences. I never knew anyone so helpless and defenceless, or,—or so ignorant, such a child. He's forfeited all his rights in you. —As it happens, you *are* free now. His rights in you *are* actually at an end."

She hardly heard him, she certainly did not understand,—she was dazed with desire and anguish.

" You've come with me now," he said, " as you never came with him, never, never, never," and now he was holding her like a vice, pressing her closer and down upon a bank of moss. She felt her feet slipping on its silken smoothness.

Until this moment there had been always the cold withholding of extreme intolerant youth in every gift of Mary's. Her proposed ultimate surrender to Oliver even had been all pure close-clipped theory. Now the woman's eternal desire to give was overmastering her. To give, give, give, everything,—and lose herself,—once for all, in another! It seemed a great thing to do, an immense thing, the ultimate great thing she had always wanted,—the merging of her little hampering self that had never been enough, never satisfied her, in a bigger, thus to unite forces that would then be illimitable.

She longed and panted to give other things also, hot and terrible things, of which until this moment she had known nothing, but had still, she knew now, always vaguely hated.

And she wanted things from Peter Turton,—and now it was those horrible things she wanted more, a thousand times more, than the great things of five minutes before.

The things, terrible or not, were sweet beyond any compare, she must have them or die. In a frenzy of longing, absolutely unconscious of what she did, she clung to him like any wild woman at the dawn of time.

The awakening of passion in a big woman must at some one moment get out of her unaccustomed hands.

And then, moved by some blind instinct of self-preservation, a strangled sob escaped her, and she tried to tear herself away.

Not that she did not want,—what she wanted,—in this dreadful way more than ever. She held him for a moment at arm's length trying to understand, to get back her senses.

He had everything her life wanted. It was madness not to take it. And,—if this was sin, the beauty of the whole world shone in sin's face !

A passionless woman with a good income and constitutionally good-tempered has had so few temptations to help her in her hour of need, and sin being a genius, has learnt the great secret, and can always hide the pain that follows after in unutterable joy. As for the terror behind the eyes of sin—it makes for daring !

Mary tried to remember things, the old things, the old refuges, the old supports. She snatched at Oliver the Less, hidden in her heart ; but this was no place for a little child !

Peter Turton's hands, gentle with love almost as great as passion, drew her softly, nearer, nearer.

She,—she was the giver—of everything. It was a greatness of giving,—an immensity, and how intensely she had always hated littleness ! This—it—was—Creation !

For one wild moment the ultimate joy of the maker made Mary the woman she wanted to be.

He waited breathless, watching her, and in the pause Oliver's face in a little circle of light filled Mary's eyes, and at last she understood,—everything.

"I know now," she cried out.—"And I'm the wickedest woman in the world."

But it was too late now. Mary, knowing nothing of men, had ventured too far, and must pay the price of her folly. She had played with fire and must get burnt.

On that bed of moss in the holy silence of the evening, under the shadow of the wise trees who know all things, the struggle between the man and the woman was as fierce and terrible as the fight of the lion for his mate in the jungle. It was more horrible and primeval. For there the prize stands aside, indifferent as to who shall have her. Here, in a frenzy of shame unspeakable, she fought for herself and for the world.

The brutality of man and beast mingled in the vile fight.

There was also something of what the struggles and the sacrifices of time have brought to Eternity, and of the unresentful patience of Infinity.

But it was Oliver at last who saved Mary, and in spite of her reckless folly, her wilful ignorance, her proud condemnation of all she had refused to understand, of her insolent picking and choosing among the inevitable means and methods of Creation, rejecting and accepting as one *above* it, God did not desert His creature.

When all her strength was gone, and her heart failing her for fear, again Oliver's eyes looked into hers, and lighted her frightened face with such a sudden radiance, that Peter Turton, who loved her,—and who, until this awful moment when passion had burst its bonds, had fought as good a fight as most men for his manhood, saw it, and it filled his eyes just as Oliver was filling Mary's, and it made a man of him again.

But the fall from man to brute cannot be recovered in a moment. It was the brute who threw the woman from him with cruel violence, bruising her soft shoulder against a tree.

“ Go ! ” it snarled. “ Go quickly.”

Dry sobs broke out upon the silence as Mary fled through the aisles now grey and grim in the shadows of the evening. She went blind and trembling, finding her way by instinct, but she was young and swift, and her strength was coming back, and Oliver ran by her side. No woman ever ran quicker than Mary that amazing night.

As soon as she reached the car, not of her own will at all, she fetched up short. And suddenly her mind was clear again. She could think and was no longer afraid. All that was past for ever,—left behind.

To run to the ends of the earth, to hide for ever from the man had been her one conscious purpose in her wild flight. She could never look upon his face again. His presence would be intolerable. All the fires of Hell burnt between him and her. Now, without a moment's warning, she was crying her heart out for him and for herself. She sank weeping on the bank, weeping tears so bitter and burning

that they scalded her cheeks, they blistered her heart. She knew in this passion of tears that she had never cried before, never loved, never suffered. Above all, that she had never forgiven. She shook and trembled, and all at once she knew that it was not only for herself and Peter Turton she was grieving, it was for everyone else too, for every man and woman and child in the whole world, and for saints as well as sinners, for infinite sorrow knows no gradations in incompleteness. She only knew that we are all very far away, and that the one thing on earth is for us all to pray hand in hand, the one helping the other,—the united strength of the world pressing it on to the Light.

But at last Mary could cry no longer. Her strength was gone, her tears were burnt dry. And with a dull vague throbbing of pain and weariness she knew that this was not all, that there was still something that she must do to help sorrow, the sorrow that she and all the others had brought upon the earth, the bitter cup of which they must all drain,—men and women and children—until each in his turn has seen life face to face, and through life the face of God, Who made it to be the mirror to reflect His perfect face, not our marred ones.

"Forgive us all," said Mary at last. "And me more than all the others."

After twenty odd years of the nightly kneelings and decorous church-goings of a pattern young life, this was Mary's first prayer.

Peter Turton started when he saw her. He expected her to be at the station half a mile behind them by this time. Her waiting shook and moved him to his depths. When she had fled from him, he had stood, a baffled beast struggling back to humanity, then he had laughed tragically out into the shadows.

He knew she was safe. Her face had conquered. She could have gone as softly as she had come through the lonely aisles her flying feet made holy.

And then with his recaptured manhood came man's Gethsemane also for Peter Turton.

Peter Turton would never be the same man again.

He left his youth behind him in that garden of agony. And when now he looked at Mary, he knew that her girlhood lay slain beside it. That was the ultimate pain of pain. No man could bear more and live.

They stood together and looked in each other's eyes, helpless and speechless, seeing all the sorrow of life.

"Can you"—he said at last, searching in some lost maze of words for the right ones, "Can you forgive?"

"But—what a word," said Mary with dark, astonished eyes, "between you and me.—Perhaps to-morrow one can talk,—but now—please take me home."

With a strange and piercing pang of renunciation, he put her into the seat behind. The maddening joy of her presence close and warm beside him was over for ever in a world that was dead.

As he tucked her in and touched her, with an ache that would ache for ever, "Our last ride together" kept humming in his ears.

He drove swiftly and carefully away from his forfeited youth, and hers ravaged by his hands.

He had panted to make a woman of her,—and this to be the result of the great adventure!

CHAPTER XXXI

IT was in the end her friendship with honest boys and good women, and her healthy out-of-door life that helped Mary through that fateful night of the "readjustment of all values," far more than the trained intelligence which had been her glory. It was these things that saved her from despair,—that purged her self-loathing of all bitterness.

She belittled nothing in the stupendous fact,—condoned nothing, slurred over nothing. After hours of blind struggle and futile effort she came at last to her sane self. She faced her own sin, the eternal forces that lie in wait watching their opportunity in all of us who have not yet learnt wisdom, the wild folly that had made the ultimate issue inevitable, as fairly as she would have faced an affair fraught with shame and tragedy of any other ignorant fool.

But she refused to lie prostrate in the dust bewailing her degradation. "If I once let myself hate myself in the way I could," she said, as she knelt beside the open window, "I'd be hating the other people just as bad as I am, in just the same way, and I'd never get on at all—and—I'd be keeping the others back too. Now I know the whole awfulness of it, everything's changed for ever, nothing ever can be the same again, the world won't be the same, or my Olivers,—or—or God,—I think, and I'll be sorry all my life. And yet—I'm glad to know. What hurts one so horribly to have learnt must be of some inestimable value to—everyone. And," she said,

"and God was there all that awful time, and He came when I could go on no longer by myself.

"It's curious," she said after a long pause, "that knowing ourselves,—and—and all our own terrors, should make us know God too. If one didn't, one would be too terrified I think to go on again,—one could never begin again in an entirely new way."

She stood up at last, when she could move at all,—and stood trembling and shaking as though broken by some great sickness. She pulled herself together presently and stole in to see Oliver. For a long time she knelt by his little bed, and the tears her agony had burnt dry began to flow again.

"And to think that I, with all the traditions, and sacrifices, and restrictions, and denials, and all the other things that have made women, and all the public opinion of the whole world to support my—my pretensions, could have been just as bad as the very worst man,—and—and have loved it. That I—of all people should want such vile things! And men with no traditions, no memories, no, no, no—repulsions, and the habit of generations to lead them on, and nothing to back them up at all!—Oh! one can't think of it," she cried, hiding her burning face.

"One daren't.—Oh, little Oliver, you've got all that before you, and a mother who has all these awful things in her—all the things you'll have to fight against, little son. I'll spend all my life trying to keep you good, you and the other boys, and I'll never judge anyone ever again. One doesn't, little Dearest, when one knows. We'll all try to be good together, and you could never hurt me, dearest dear, as I've hurt myself. But it seems to me," she said sadly, "that in this big fight you've got to stand up against the whole world and every creature in it."

Mary was very white when she came down next morning. She looked very tired.

"You went too far yesterday, dear," said Mrs. Mirrilies kindly. "You look so tired, but here are all the Indian letters to rest you."

It was her weekly joy to hand Mary her husband's letters.

"He hasn't written to me this week, but I mustn't grumble, he's very good."

"He's had a slight touch of the sun," said Mary presently, wondering if her voice sounded all right. "That's why he didn't write last week."

"Oliver—a touch of the sun! I thought he was sun-proof."

"He was quite well when he wrote." Mary glanced again at her letter. "The rest seems to be all business," she said. "I'll keep it until afterwards."

She made a pretence of eating, said a few casual things to Miss Caldecott and Fräulein, and the instant she could, escaped to her room.

* * * * *

For a few minutes she could not see at all, the letters danced before her eyes. She had already seen enough to daze most women.

When he had told her why he had not written the previous week, quietly, dispassionately, without any preamble whatsoever, Oliver said :

"I was too ill to write last mail day, and as you will see, could not very well ask anyone to write for me. It was most unfortunate. I hope to God you have not heard what I am about to tell you from anyone else. You have more real courage than any woman I have ever known, and now you will want it all.

"I have unspeakably bad news, dear. A fortnight ago to-day, just before I got the touch of sun, Major Quayle served me with a writ making me co-respondent in a suit against his wife. We are both innocent. At the same time, Quayle is too able a man to begin a case unless he's pretty sure of making out a good one, and in my unfortunate illness, out of sheer goodness of heart, Barbara may have been rather foolish. I shall never forget her goodness. She saved my life, but she was never very wise, you know, and I don't suppose I was very

wise myself just then. A sick man is at his worst, and will get what he can out of anyone good enough to help him, and Barbara is an incomparable nurse.

"Since then I have, as you know, been a great deal at the Quayles'. I told you how he had changed in his treatment of his wife, and how insistent he was in his invitations to me. Apparently I've been a fool all round. It's been a put-up job on his part from the beginning,—no doubt he can get any amount of native evidence. It seems too that the station has been talking. Quayle wants to marry a woman I believe the fellow cares for in as decent a way as he can, and this is his way out. He'll fight tooth and nail for his freedom.

"There have been rumours about you which he is making use of,—I find now. The usual things. Some woman at St. Moritz wrote to another here about you and Turton, the man you told me about. It appears that Barbara knew this, and not to annoy me, didn't say a word about it. I had a row with her. Wild things were said. I am afraid Barbara gave herself away and Quayle, it appears, was listening. And now he's making the most of it to his own advantage. Had I known when Barbara did, I should have been home now and with you. I gave my assistant leave instead, and am now tied here.

"If I were at home, I should know exactly how we stand, you and I. I'll fight to the death for both of us and the boy, of course, and also for that unfortunate Barbara,—a fool with a broken heart is about as bad a thing to tackle as you can well imagine,—and she saved my life, you know. I'll make a good fight. I have everything to fight for. If Quayle wins, everything must go by the board for us. But if you only knew what love was, Mary, I could fight better.

"It's an awful thing to have brought into your life, child. There is no excuse for folly. I shall never forgive myself. I ought to have known Quayle.

"I'm telling you all this brutally and bluntly, and yet I can tell it in no other way. I haven't the slightest

idea, you see, how you will take it. I mean that part of you to which a man always turns in his uttermost need. The shock, moral and mental, will be awful, poor child. I hate to think of you, my splendid, pure, proud Mary, but will *that* part of you forgive the criminal folly that's brought this catastrophe upon you and our boy?

"You are loyal to your soul, my dear. That you'll believe in my innocence and Barbara's I have no doubt. It is a superb thing in this moment to have a wife of such quality as yours; but it would be easier now if you cared in the way women not fit to tie your shoe-strings seem to be able to care.

"I have ample time to prepare my defence. The case won't come up for months. Tell my mother as little or as much as you like. I trust you entirely."

Mary sat for hours, it seemed to her, before she could think. She had no tears now. Yesterday had swallowed all her tears. To-morrow called for sterner things than tears, and her life was now of To-morrow, and not of To-day.

That song was sung, that story told.

She sat still, tearless, resolute, striving for the courage that can prevail over Hell itself, for a pure heart, and for a clear understanding.

"Oliver only knows me as I was," she thought, at last, "and he thinks I can't help him even now. He hasn't asked me to go to him. He thinks I'll sit tight here being moral and shocked, and considering the matter with a well-trained intelligence! He isn't sure of me. Oh! Oliver! Oliver! Oliver! My dear! Oh! my dear.

"He doesn't know that after yesterday I could help any man living, no matter how much a man he was or how little, and even if he hadn't been innocent, Oliver's sin would have been mine as much as his, and wouldn't have made one atom of difference."

She paused and caught her breath: "Or—or at least hardly any.—And—and to dare to say I didn't know how to love!—As if he could say anything else," she said

with a small and quavering laugh. "But I'll soon show him!"

"And—I feel so dull and dead and tired, and to-morrow is their wedding-day! I'll say nothing, and do nothing until it's over," she said after a long pause. "I can catch the boat at Marseilles if necessary, and I can pack in a few hours. At least Miss Caldecott can pack, and Oliver the Less can be a month here, and another at the Vicarage, and oh! to have to leave him behind!—and—we'll come home together—Oliver and I!"

"And to-day—to-day I must see Peter Turton.—My new life isn't beginning very easily, but I can live it, I think.—When one knows everything, one can."

"And—and—God did come when I could go on no longer by myself.

"That other letter's from Barbara," she said, glancing at the envelope. "I won't read it now. Barbara is too little for our To-morrow, Oliver's and mine! It's too big and awful for her.—It will probably swallow her up in the end."

"Oh, but it mustn't," Mary cried after a moment's pause. "She saved Oliver's life, which is more than ever I did. I'm glad she has that at least to look back to. And—oh! Oh! I'm gladder that I'm not Barbara."

"And the wedding to-morrow, and it's got to be such a wedding as never was! And, and—I feel sort of idiotic," she said, tottering to her feet. "This new life wants feeding I think. I'd better go down to luncheon. And I wonder how I look."

She looked anything but satisfactory, so she pulled down her hair and built up its shining masses in a new way, until the result made her feel more fit to face Peter Turton, and the wedding and the parting with little Oliver, and those endless weeks of silence, and at the end of them—what?

She put on a new blouse and a pendant with a king sapphire in it for luck, and even Miss Caldecott, whose lynx eyes of love had made her anxious, was satisfied with the luncheon she ate.

"You said we might get the flowers for to-night and to-morrow," said Mary, turning to her mother-in-law. "I meant to get them this morning, but I read letters instead, and slacked and did my hair, and Mr. Turton is coming this afternoon,—so will you three, you," she nodded at Miss Caldecott, "and Fräulein and Oliver get the flowers?"

"Roses," said Oliver unctuously, "an' heaps of 'em."

"Well, roses an' heaps of them, and then we'll all put them into your most precious china bowls, Mother, just for once, and I'll wash them myself when it's all over,—or you will," said Mary, turning with a guilty grin to Miss Caldecott. "It's sure to be you in the end."

"I should feel very much happier, dear Mary, if it were," said Mrs. Mirrilies, smiling, and her eyes rested lingeringly, half pleased, half puzzled upon her daughter-in-law.

There was something different in Mary, something she could not grasp, and could she grasp it, of which she might not at all approve, but she never came nearer to loving Oliver's wife with her whole heart than she did at this moment.

"I'm going to my room," said Mary lightly, "and when you and Mr. Turton have dealt with mixed farming from every point of view, please send him up to me."

"Not bad that, for a woman whose husband is just going to be divorced and with the most awful interview of her life before her," said Mary, with a touch of her old vainglory. "And—I won't think of it. It's got to be lived, and I'll live it, that's all."

She tried to nail her eyes to the chaste pages of the *Standard*, but it was rather too severe a strain for this amateur in real life. "I'll look at the people in the street instead," she said. "They are all busy living I suppose, or perhaps most of them are only just learning to live like me. Still even the deadest is more alive than that awful paper!" She flung it aside, and knelt on the window-seat to peer.

The quiet indifference of the passing faces became

almost as much of a strain upon Mrs. Mirrilies as the *Standard*, and had apparently as little to do with life.

"But why on earth don't they let me have just one little look into them?" said Mary, wriggling restively, "just to understand, and be sort of friends. Don't they care for anything? Or are they too proud and haughty, or have they suffered too much to let their faces speak out?—Or is it all just bluff like me?"

"But it can't be so hard for everyone as it is for me," she cried out on a dry sob. "Oh! it can't, it can't, or—or—no more children would ever be born into the world.—And what makes me think of that? I, of all people, who was afraid of children, because they would one day be men and women as foolish as myself. Oh, what have I done?" she said, "what have I done? . . . I wish he'd come," she said at last, "and get that part over, and then I could go on with this. I can't do them both together."

He came soon.

There was still a faint hope in his heart that he would see her girlhood once more, but his first glance killed that. She was a woman with eyes as sad as they were sweet, and for so fine and fair a creature extraordinarily humble.

There was nevertheless a *grande dame* look about her that was strange and arresting, and it widened the distance between them. He fetched up short and stood waiting.

"But won't you sit down?" said Mary.

When he looked again he saw that she was a new creature, fresh from the mint; the eyes that looked out at him were eyes he had never yet seen—only her voice was the old one he knew so well.

"There must be a great deal for us to say to each other," she said presently, "and yet now you've come words seem so ridiculous—don't you think?—Oh! but let me speak first," she cried. "That's our privilege." He laughed grimly under his breath. There were still points of resemblance, it seemed, between this woman and the woman he had known.

"I want to tell you that I know now the wrong I did

you, and my abominable unfairness not only to you, but to every other living man. I know now what you are, and how you feel, and how hard it is to be good for—all of us who know. I refused to know, and made myself a woman's world, the world most women live in, and we sit there on tribunals made by ourselves, and judge and condemn the real world of which we know nothing, or only know it all wrong. We want it to be our own world,—to live it in our own way, and leave out and put in what way *we* like. The things we can't leave out, we walk round or look away from,—we must humour our established points of view or die, I think. We'll do anything but face life just as it is."

"Oh! I say it so badly," she said. "It's all so new—only a day old, and I can't put it rightly; but do try to understand. One has thought and read and listened to lectures, of course, but it's all nothing till one knows, till one has—has—lived the life one cut so carefully out of all one's calculations." She hid her burning face in her hands.

Peter Turton sat with bowed head, waiting. She had claimed her dreadful right and she must have it, but his shame burnt deeper than hers.—He sat in hell and waited.

"It's like taking a lighted match into a powder magazine," she said. "Your foundations are all blown up. Your walls are all about your ears, and your curtains and all your decorations in tatters. You've just escaped with your life, that's all.

"And," she said presently, lifting her head. "What makes yesterday so impossible, so degrading, so unforgivable to me,—is that it's Oliver I love. There's no excuse anywhere for me. It's worse for you now, perhaps,—if—if anything could be worse,—but I'm glad you have some excuse. It's so dreadful having none at all.—And—and to think of having to say all this to you when we were such friends."

"We're friends still," he said in a quick harsh voice.

"But can we be ever again?" she asked, "with this

between us? Real sin is the most awful thing in the world," she said, shivering. "Do you think it will always come between us?" She lifted entreating eyes to his pitying remorseful ones. "I don't want it to," she protested; "you're the only grown-up friend I've ever had,—and I want you now—immensely. I know—I know—" she said, looking up at him, "it will be horrible for you,—in a way,—in the beginning, but—but—"

"Now look here, Mrs. Mirrilies," he said steadily. "If a man has made a fool of himself and a beast of himself,—that's his look-out, not yours. He's got to live it out, that's all. It's the one thing left for him to do, and you don't want to deprive a man of the job he's earned, do you?"

He broke off helplessly. Her eyes silenced him. Her face moved him too deeply for word or protest.

"That's all over and done with," he said presently. "It will leave its mark on both of us, that's inevitable; but it's just as inevitable that we must both leave it behind and get on. Neither of us can afford to turn it into an obstacle in our path. And if its first effect was to break a friendship like ours—think what it would mean to me, think of the throw-back to everything it would be?—This is the thing to make or mar a man.—You have a lot in your hands."

"It will be horrible for you," she said, with the beautiful eyes of a Mother.

He winced.

"Horrible or not, it's all that's left me, and my best incentive to a decent life.—I'll play fair, you know."

"But—as if I doubted it! But,—it *is* an obstacle.—It must be,—it—it blocks the horizon somehow," she said sadly.

"When I came in you meant to dismiss me for good. Your conscience was pricking you on. You'll be re-organizing that conscience of yours next, Mrs. Mirrilies.—It's pretty feminine still.—But I never meant to go for good.—I'd better tell you at once. You may want a man about the place soon."

She looked at him and started. She remembered something he had said yesterday. It hadn't struck her then,—but now—— She put her hands to her tired head, and tried to recall things. Oliver was afraid that someone else might tell her.—Could he, by any possibility, have heard?

"I do want a man about the place now," she said. "Boys and women aren't enough. Why did you say that to me just now?"

"Did you get your Indian letters?" he asked gently.

She nodded, dumb and white.

"Let me help you if I can."

"What do you know?" she asked faintly.

"I believe I know what you do."

"Yes," she said in an odd dead voice. "You know. I'm going out by the next boat. I'll catch it easily. There's plenty of time. But the wedding must be a success—first. You can help me a great deal.—I shouldn't have given in to my conscience in the end. I want your help too much."

"I'll see about your passage at once. And you're right: the wedding must go like cream."

"Oliver is innocent, as it happens," she said quietly. "But if he weren't, his sin would be mine too, and it wouldn't make one atom of difference. And Oliver's career isn't going to be over at thirty-two. We won't let it. How I haven't an idea, but we won't. What I'm going to do when I get there I haven't an idea. And whether Oliver will want me or not I haven't an idea. He will," she said in a low voice, "before I'm done with him."

She was as still as marble and as white.

He took out his watch.

"There's an hour and a half still to tea. Will you lie down till then? I'll go and secure your passage at once, and then talk to Mrs. Mirrilies. I meant to cut tea, of course, and grouse in my den, but there's more sense in this. Lie down, for God's sake. You mustn't look like that when they see you. Are you all right about money?"

"I have a big balance, I think there's plenty. If not, I'll come to you."

She paused and turned to look at him. A scarlet flush rushed to her white cheeks. There was a torment of pity in her eyes.

"If only I'd known," she said simply. "It's too terrible for you. I—I have hope,—and you have nothing,—except the one excuse that counts."

"Now, Mrs. Mirrilies, worrying yourself to death because you didn't take better care of a man isn't the sort of thing to buck him up, you know. Leave me to make the best of my sins and my sorrows,—later on, when I have time. You have enough on your hands without them. That chapter's closed, and what we've got to do is to turn over that page, and begin the next, and to remember that one bad chapter never yet damned any book, and won't now."

"I'm not thinking of you altogether," said Mary, with a touch of her old spirit. "It's my own horrible part in,—in—everything."

"You're much too sensible a woman," said Peter Turton with a wry mouth, "to start a lifelong repentance—for what never happened. Lie down, Mrs. Mirrilies, and be ready to meet them, and believe in To-morrow and your own power over it. You have a lot in your hands, you know,—the fate of two men,—you've got to keep me going as well as Mirrilies, you see, for the rest of my life. You've got enough on your hands to make up for any yesterday;—so have I, for the matter of that. And now,—for everyone's sake,—get your face right."

When Peter Turton got outside the door, he fetched up short, and for an instant let go his grip on himself. The sweat stood out on his ruddy face; he shook like a girl.

"So this is love," he said grimly—"this! And I'm glad I love her!—And to be lecturing her like that and playing the fool myself!" he said, as he went down the stairs.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN Mary's complication of pains and problems, so acutely adult; all unsolved; many of them apparently beyond solution, the lesser agony of her parting from her boy, was pushed back at first into the background, into some world whose ways were clear, whose paths were plain.

Even when Oliver and she put the roses into the beautiful bowls, and afterwards by their combined gaiety made the bridal pair forget their embarrassment at their own temerity, the parting was still as some external menace, a shadowy dream from some life that had been. It was too young a grief perhaps to find any real fellowship with ancient agonies.

It was later on, in the night, that it slipped into Mary's heart and melted it back to youth.

Otherwise the awful sense of age that lay with the weight of all the ages upon her, the burden of her participation in the adult life of man, would have broken Mary.

It would certainly in the end have frustrated her youthful enough efforts to make the eve of the wedding go so trippingly that Miss Gaunt should leave the bitterness of inevitable loss behind her for ever, and rock on, in sure and certain bliss, with her Bishop.

In his deep sympathy with even her unspoken points of view Mary saw perfectly well that the good simple man was being badgered by Miss Gaunt into feeling rather ashamed of himself for his belated venture. He would, had he been permitted, have gladly sneaked off to some obscure church for the ratification of the contract,

although in his secret soul he loved the pomp and ceremony of a very distinguished Bishop and two Arch deacons to launch him and his beloved into their life together.

And even in the fact that the path of Julia should be strewn with flowers and the tables be gay with them in her honour, he could find nothing at all ridiculous. Nothing could be good enough, or sweet enough, or young enough for the woman he had chosen when they had both been young together. The years that had passed between the day he had first loved her and now were as a dream dreamed to this true lover.

"If she's thinking all the time of the years that the locusts have eaten," said Mary after dinner to Miss Caldecott and Mr. Turton—who, coerced by the ironic cynicism inherent in circumstances not only had tea at the house, but also dinner, "she'll be spoiling the Bishop's day out to-morrow, and I believe it will be his first real proper day out since he was in Switzerland—how many years ago?"

"It will, dear Mary," faltered Miss Caldecott with a sudden sad understanding. "She's so conscientious."

"Bother her conscience! She's got to make that good old man as happy as a boy with the whole of time before him."

"But the Bishop shall have his To-morrow," said Mary "if I have to shake all her yesterdays out of Julia. Now, Mr. Turton, bring them all over to us. I have a little surprise for all of you. It's Oliver's secret and mine, but wait, I think we'll show it to you two first."

She looked round carefully, then opened the door into a little ante-room. A scent as of summer gardens floated out, and for a minute one could see nothing but carnations, rose and white and yellow, with the tender grey grace of their spiky leaves the one minor note in the pure high key of colour, and in and out amidst the fine bowls of china and the tall, thin glasses were ranged the presents.

"Oliver and I did it all," said Mary proudly. "First we thought of having spring flowers; then we decided

they'd only give rise to morbid regrets, and no one can say that carnations aren't quite grown up."

"When did you and Oliver do all this?" inquired Peter Turton imperturbably.

"Oh, after we'd done the roses," said Mary, and again she flushed painfully.

"Shall I bring in the victims?" he asked, "or will you wait for the boys?"

Mary paused and listened. "I hear them! Bring them all in together.—The boys are dears. Just look at the books they've given between them. No one could have found out what the Bishop wanted most in the world after his Julia but Hallowes, and it took even him a week."

Mary turned to lift the head of one carnation and lower that of another, and for some curious reason she held on tight to Oliver's little hand. The horror of the secret between her and Peter Turton seemed to be burning into her. This intimate mutual knowledge that seemed to try, by forcing them apart to keep them together,—always together.

It was an intolerable thing. It spoilt what was so indispensable, and so unspeakably dear, the friendship of this man. Infinitely more calamitous it seemed to divide her from Oliver. "It's a barrier between me and the whole world," she thought sadly, "and yet there are people who can go on like this for their whole lives, or—who can't—and so *do* things and no wonder. And how is one to break the awful bond? It's right, it's the best thing I have just now except Oliver. But oh! how it hurts!"

"Oliver!" she said hurriedly, "when you and I do things together they always turn out well. Just look at those yellow carnations! We'll always do things together, darling dear, and even when we go away from each other we'll still pretend we're doing everything together, and so everything will be much easier, and we'll do things much better."

"But we never go away from each other," said Oliver with unmoved innocence.

"But we may have to some day. Look at Harry and Jim."

"They're big men, an' they have you."

"Yes," said Mary, with another abominable prick.—Was her secret coming between her and her boys now? "Oh, well, I do my best, but I'm not their own mother."

"No," said Oliver thoughtfully, "but I give 'em all I can spare of you, and they give all they can spare of their own Muvvers to us,—to you an' me;—we've all got on all right."

"Until the real sons and the real mothers come together again. And, you know, Oliver, when they have to go away again from their mothers, or their mothers from them, brave men never howl or make a nuisance of themselves, they just make the best of any temporary mother who'll take them on, and do things all the time in their hearts with their own real mothers."

"Oh," said Oliver, with wide, interested eyes, there was a curious feeling of adventure in the arrangement—"like you an' the boys and Lasotovitsch—and—" He broke off short—some horrible thing had suddenly slipped into the story.

"But little, little boys can't go lookin' for muvvers; the muvvers mightn't know what 'em was lookin' for."

"Oh, Oliver, you'd soon show them, and they'd just jump at you, little dear. There are thousands of mothers who haven't any always looking for children, and millions of aunts—and—"

"I don't like this story," said Oliver, with a quick scared look, clinging to his mother's hand. "Don't tell me any more, darling dear. An' there's the boys an'—Oh! I'm glad!"

He threw himself with quite unusual fervour upon his friends, and his mother caught a sharp breath. "Oh! What shall I do?" she said. "What shall I do?"

She was ready, however, to welcome the boys and to show off her wares, and to ignore as long as she could the half-sad, half-humorous protest in Miss Gaunt's eyes.

but at last, whilst the others were listening to the Bishop belauding his books, the bride-to-be cornered Mary.

"You've done me in, after all," said she.

"Now look here," said Mary. "You may set me lines if you like, or even send me to bed, I don't care; it wouldn't be the first time, but I'm going to speak the truth or bust. For the most unselfish woman I've ever known, you're being selfish to a degree no smaller human being could ever attain to. You've been grousing in your heart about the lost years, and the lost hair, and the lost waist, and, above all, the lost babies, the things you think you've defrauded that unfortunate angel of, till unless you stop, and that very soon, he'll begin to believe you, and be sorry he didn't marry some creature with all the things you've lost, and be miserable ever after. Can't you let him take what he wants? If he'd wanted all those things more than he wanted you, he'd have taken them. Women are plenty and Bishops scarce. As for the presents, to rob us of the joy of giving our things when you've taken our hearts is simply ridiculous. Besides, remember that your Robert is ours too, and if you spoil to-morrow for him and us, we'll never forgive you, and it will probably end in your Robert's making off with the organist. She's pretty, and young, and has probably a most genteel waist."

"I never said a word to Robert," said the bride with spirit.

"As if Robert didn't know."

"How do *you* know," demanded Miss Gaunt in quite her old manner.

"I know a great deal," said Mary. "I'm growing up."

Miss Gaunt with a quick movement swung her round to the light.

"You are, child," she said gently. "You're growing up. Was there anything I could have done for you and didn't just lately when I was embedded in old pains—that no longer matter?"

"Nothing in the world," said Mary, laughing steadily,

" except not worrying the Bishop into looking on matrimony as a penance."

" And to think your first grown-up act should be to bring my sin home to me ! It's hard on an old governess who's spanked you in her day. You wanted it badly, Mary ; but to think that as near an approach to my own child as is possible in the circumstances, should have caught me napping ! It just brings one's limitations home to one. No imitation can be like the real thing. You'd never have eluded a real mother."

" You're the realest mother I've ever had, and there was nothing that any mother could help me in. And—you've always been swearing at me because I wasn't quite grown-up, you know."

" I know, at any rate, that you've been hustled into the business, and it needn't have hurt in the fiendish way it has."

" But it's over and done with," said Mary stoutly, " and I'm glad I'm grown-up. And,—I oughtn't to have let you know,—and yet I'm glad you do know. It makes you an even more real Mother. But remember it's not going to spoil to-morrow, it's only going to bring me a little more into it,—you'll want me there, you and your Bishop. You know you will. And don't ever forget that I'm glad to be grown-up, glad ! glad ! glad ! no matter how much it hurts. And—I'm quite to be trusted," said Mary, looking out of her frank sincere eyes into Miss Gaunt's searching ones. " Be just as sure of your daughter, you dearest of old dears, as your daughter is of you. And this is our good-bye ! And now come back to the presents. You haven't half admired Oliver's orange Ruskin cups, and Lasotovitsch's 'Omar Khayyám,' or the boys' books."

" I'll hug them all before they're much older," said the bride-elect. " Do you think they'd mind ? "

" Come and find out ! " said Mary.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE effect of her new knowledge worked all for good in Miss Gaunt's case. It gave her a bad night indeed, but that over and done with, she dropped the past like a hot coal, dumped firmly into the present, and butted heroically out into the future.

Anything properly alive and growing always appealed vigorously to this vigorous lady. It was prowling round amongst perished hopes,—kisses unkissed, children she could never mother,—that had undone her. Now with good honest sobs she thanked God for her Bishop and other blessings, and resolved that their wedding day, with all its disabilities, should for ever bury the hatchet between her and fate. Besides, since they'd found each other, they had lost nothing really. The past had cost them both infinite things, but all was now paid up, whilst Mary's settling day was all to come.

Moreover, she decided with spirit, it was her day, not Mary's, and it was for her to make it go.—Mary took too much upon herself!

Next morning the Bishop, good guileless man, setting convention at defiance, paid an almost indecently early call upon the ladies. Cousin Ella was still in bed preparing for this day of colossal emotion, so he had Julia all to himself.

" You'll be glad to hear, Robert," she said stoutly, as soon as she had put a substantial breakfast before him, " that I'm leaving the past to bury itself decently. It's robbed both of us of a lot,—me more than you,—for even the years are harder on women than on men. It's hardly

necessary to tell you that I've been feeling like a male-factor for letting you take a basket of fragments when you might have had a whole woman. However, Mary reminded me last night that that's your business, not mine. You've got what you want, and must make the best of it,—so much for that ! We'll plant the grave of the past with sweet herbs, Robert, and rue for remembrance,—and now for the present !—Eat your bacon, Robert.—It seems that Mary has been growing up with a vengeance while I've been grousing and you humouring me,—and in the process she nearly fell into some abominable pit,—the usual one of course,—a man like that isn't always about the place for nothing. Go on with your breakfast ! " she commanded. " That's all over. Mary's safe, but the rest is all to come.—And—oh ! Robert, Mary and her past, and present, and future, and all her sorrow is our best wedding present, I think. It makes her part and substance of our day. She feels it herself. She said so last night in a way,—and to be trying to stick a musty old past like mine into our day and spoil its freshness, with such a daughter ! Mary's coming of age is our wedding day !

" There's a tremendous advantage really in plunging slick into the lives of our own children, not having to wait years for things to happen, getting worn out with whooping cough and measles and modern education before things begin to hum ! "

" That," said the Bishop, " has been precisely my own view now for a long time."

" I'm glad we agree in something," said the bride-elect.

" Mary is very peculiarly our child to-day," said the Bishop thoughtfully ; " but Peter Turton is almost as much so surely. Mary is going on.—Whatever has happened will only drive her forward on the great march, and her goal is before her. Peter Turton is I fear held up in the rear with no longer any visible goal at all."

" Well, yes.—It's all pretty immoral," she sighed, " and yet I can't blame him. If I do, I'll be blaming Mary too, and one can't to-day."

"Nor to-morrow, nor the next day! One can't blame anyone till one can understand him, and who can understand the other? Besides, then I fancy we shouldn't blame at all."

"At any rate the poor derelicts who've outlived all their own preoccupations have other fish to fry. We have a fine mixed family, Robert, Mary, and Peter Turton, and little Oliver, and later on his father,—and the three boys."

"Even should we grow bored with each other, we can never be lonely, dear Julia."

"Or moribund! We'll always have a sorrow or so to keep us alive. I'm not grousing, Robert. I'm glad we're still alive enough to take our part in all that's passed us by, and to understand, and help in the big things in life. If they're big they hurt. It's the price of size and space.

"It's a splendid wedding day. It's big with life!" she said, with tears in her honest eyes. "It's so big that it holds everything.—Now go, for goodness sake! I must rout Ella out of her bed, and put some backbone into her sentiment, and set myself out to the best advantage.—I was always as ugly as sin, Robert, but I'm not going to apologize any more.—It's a reflection on you, after all, for not having more of an artistic eye."

Robert being human, slightly shifted his feet, and glanced at the sideboard, and then for the first time she was aware of a beautiful bouquet of flowers.

"I say, did you bring them?—did Mary—"

"I had Mary's permission, my dear."

"And do you mean to say you chose them and put them together? That's no shop bunch. Well—I never! I knew you were a poet in your heart, dear, but I had never suspected you of an artistic eye. How could I, being me?—Oh, go, or I'll never be ready!"

* * * * *

It wasn't the least like the wedding anyone had ever designed or expected, but they all enjoyed it.

Directly the boys arrived Hallowes took it over, lock, stock, and barrel, and from that moment it was the youngest wedding on record.

At first it nearly shocked Cousin Ella to death, but Heron took her in hand, and soon restored her.

The Bishop and the two Archdeacons had the day of their lives. It seemed to lift hundredweights of vicarious sin from their burdened hearts. They ate astonishing amounts of indigestible substances with impunity, and went home with a fellow feeling for the minor clergy and other irritants that beset the Church Militant they had never before experienced.

"I don't suppose for a moment that young Russian has any morals at all," said the Bishop, as they all drove back together; "and were he my son, I should be extremely anxious about the fellow who ran the show,—the other is safe enough. The man Turton is plainly head over ears in love with that splendid young married woman, and the bride and bridegroom are aware of everything, and condone it all. Our brother has chosen both his wife and his friends well if not wisely.—I think," he said presently, "that we have been serving to-day at the marriage of Cana of Galilee, for surely Christ in His youth was in our midst."

The Archdeacons, who were his oldest friends and had always thought Thomas rather a hard man, smiled gently out into the twilight.

Just at the last, before the good-byes were said, the bride enticed her new possession into the little room of carnations and signalled to Hallowes.

"We want Mary here to ourselves for five minutes. Just manage it."

"All the old buffers are sitting in her pocket," said Heron, with his usual consideration for the aged.

"Dislodge them then, and look sharp, or we'll lose the train," said the bride brutally.

"Now, child," said she, when Heron had carefully shut in Mary. "Tell us everything. We can't go away like this. We must take the whole of you with us. If any-

thing could spoil our day, it would be for you to refuse us our natural part in your sorrow."

"But I'll write," said Mary, flushing. "Of course I'll write. Can't you keep to-day all for yourselves?"

"And leave you out? But how could we?—you're part of our day. You can't give an old childless couple yourself, Mary, and deny us your sorrow on such a day as this?" said the Bishop.

For an instant Mary was silent. Then with bowed head and as simply as a child and in as few words, she told them everything. Her sin and folly, her sorrow and her tormenting fear.

"The sins of children don't count," said the bride cheerfully. "So much for that! Peter Turton, however, is not a child, far from it! He must pay up like the man he is,—and the rest was all inevitable,—the folly and the madness, and—the price must be paid—in pain. But it's too beautiful a wedding day to be spoilt in the end," she said and paused, and suddenly for one moment her old ugly face was young and beautiful. "I don't *believe*," she said, "I *know* that out of our great sorrow shall come great joy. At the same time," she added practically, "there's no use blinking facts, they're serious and malign. And this is now our job. We'll see every divorce specialist in England, and if necessary follow hot on your heels, with every modern instrument for the suppression of Satan in tow."

"To-morrow——"

"That's just like you, Robert. You must always be flying to the help of the afflicted. At our age we must go softly. In any case, any unconsidered action would only embarrass Mary, and there's no hurry. Mary must send us all details before we can move at all. To-morrow we have our honeymoon on our hands. You're not going to do me out of that after waiting so long for it, my good man!—Oh, Mary, having been a fool makes you more our own real child than ever,—there's nothing like folly for bringing people together.

"But when folly has done its worst, wisdom must step

in, and there's when Robert will be indispensable. And fortunately I have common sense. Meanwhile having the whole of you in our honeymoon will keep it full to the brim with everything we've always been hankering after. And,—you're right, my dear. Your place is with your husband,—divorce proceedings or not, even if it was only to keep that poor creature Barbara from further idiocies."

"God bless you, my child," was all the Bishop said, his wife having said all the rest.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IT was not necessary, after all, to catch the boat at Marseilles, and Mary longed for the bitter stimulation of the wild Northern seas. So down through the turbid green waters, past the white cliffs, the grim grey coasts, the flat sands opal and pearl as the evening fell, they went, and in the spell of the ruined pasts and the unborn futures of Western Europe in transition, Mary felt at home with her sorrow. For there is great sorrow in all the Western airs, an unquenchable terror, and an infinite desire.

Hope struggled to her feet in the blue of the Southern seas, for here the sorrow was more ancient,—pushed far back into a rock-hewn grave upon which the dawn of the resurrection has not yet arisen.—It was a pensive sorrow with which Mary's passionate pain had nothing to do.

Since it was the wrong season, the passengers consisted chiefly of poor officers and their dependents.—Men old before their time, forced all too soon back to duty. Permanently faded women, silently enduring everything.

None of them could make out Mary. She neither looked nor dressed as though she ought to be there at all, and offered no explanation whatsoever as to her precipitation into so unaccustomed an atmosphere. Their attitude towards her could hardly be called sympathetic. It was hard, and a little curious.

The bitterness of insufficient means has an insidious way of hurting souls. It was Mary's first experience of this form of poverty: she knew nothing of the cruel non-human forces which produce the petty vices of the moral

and cultured impecunious classes, and she was too selfish and preoccupied herself just then to tackle the unpleasant problem.

It was all so little, and parting and pain so big, and nothing is much more irritating than to watch passively the things to which humanity will tamely submit: it sometimes made Mary's impatience to get on and out of it almost unbearable.

And the blue and the beauty of the Southern seas left her as untouched as it did the poor harassed gentlepeople of small means.

"It's like spending your whole time with Barbara," she said one day, as she watched a group—"and to have a writ of divorce served on you on account of a person like Barbara!"—she reflected as she gazed half fascinated. "Not a person at all,—Barbara! only just a chip off a type!—Oh, poor, poor Oliver!"

It was too ludicrous. Suddenly she laughed, and laughing, she awoke from the torpor that had fallen upon her.

"This will never do," she said. "I'm being Barbara all over myself."

She lifted herself with vigour from her long chair and retired to her cabin for meditation. But first she looked in her glass, and was certain she saw little lines just like those on the faces of the other women cutting up under the smooth surface, and—her neck was scraggy! And now it struck her that she had hardly eaten anything since she had held Oliver's hand on the platform, and caught the last glimpse of Peter Turton going back to his ruined life with Cousin Ella and the little Moth in tow.

"But it's so exactly like Barbara," she repeated, "and as if one Barbara wasn't enough for Oliver. I'll eat an immense tea, and then I'll talk to the others. I daresay they'll let me. They must be very tired of each other by this time, and they'll be as good, anyway, as psychological lectures, and not half so exhausting to the brain."

There was a sigh of relief upon the entrance of Mary into the ship's life,—the sense of tension had become

oppressive, and some new freedom was let loose. Although resenting with vague bitterness her possession of everything for which they had always been hoping, they yet welcomed any change.

To Mary they seemed to be all prisoners together in sordid bonds they could only break in breaking themselves, and those dearest to them in pieces. The men were doubly in bondage, having each brought some woman into it also. They were hemmed in by limitations, cabined, cribbed, confined, and the awful thing about the men was that they resented the outward and visible signs of captivity in their fellow-captives.

It was Mary's first intimate association with that poverty with the serpent's tooth. The poverty of those with the spacious mind, and the spacious views, and the right to all the dignity of space that generations of it had conferred upon them, and had unhappily bequeathed nothing but the longing for those things natural to their quality to devastate their souls.

One man who had left Sandhurst with high hopes and the sword of honour, was bringing out his worn wife at the wrong time that his boy might go to his own old school. Another, a born soldier, at the very moment when things at the Frontier were simmering to the boil, must go over to the Political, that the children at home should have everything that was their just due.

A faded young mother was bringing out her girl a year too soon, to send the boy, who was a genius, up to Oxford. The boy must not suffer, upon that they were all agreed, but the girl would have lost her bloom before her first season.

Another fighter by Divine right was going over, with a wry mouth, to the Army Service Corps.

The men who make the Empire were being driven like dumb beasts to worse than slaughter. It was their dumbness that made Mary outrageous. His own story was never told by one of them. It was always some other woman who told it. Not the immediate sufferer. *She* never spoke. One of the others did that, and with

an air of finality in the story so destroying that Mary always wanted to shake her.

No woman should dare to speak like that of the career of a man. No woman should ever give up.

And even if the victim herself didn't speak, she looked dull.

It seemed to Mrs. Mirrilies, now alive and alert, as she looked up and down the rows of women, that what courage is to man faith is to woman, and that with enough of it, she can move the world. "And even the simplest faith, the tiniest sprout," thought this intolerant young woman, "one can tend and water like a flower until it breaks into everlasting bloom."

It seemed to Mary, the theorist, a wonderful thing, this faith of woman!—a mighty heritage, that the passive should thus inspire the active, until she "lifts 'em, lifts 'em, lifts 'em, to the charge that wins the day!"

Mary had still the grace, however, to laugh at herself.

She, who had been on the very brink of despair, letting everything slip by, the beauty and the sadness of the whole world, and all the splendour and the tragedy of men! And even now she was blaming sympathetic observers who told things in the wrong way, and silent creatures on the rack who didn't smile.

She also had forgotten her rights, and her heritage; above all, she had resented the pains and penalties of being a woman, grudging the price, forsooth, for so great a glory.

"And now to be finding fault with anyone!" said Mary. "I'll do what I can, anyway, to make up for it now,—and I just wonder how the blind will lead the blind, who're all the time wishing, with blinking half-open eyes, they had blouses like yours, and feeling uneasy about their husbands, if you talk too long to them.—I could talk to them for ever, and praise them and admire them until they just swelled with vanity—but being a woman has its drawbacks. We must pay in that way too!"

She sighed.

"I'll have to pay by forcing the poor things on the rack into doing what I'd much rather do myself. I simply adore those men and the futures I see in them. Oh! I'll stick to the women," she said with a sigh that nearly degenerated into a groan, "with an occasional relapse for recovery. I'll tidy them up and do little things for them, and then,—then I'll just say,—with a difference,—the things I'll be saying all my life to Oliver, if—if"—she burst out on a sob. "But I won't have any ifs," she said valiantly again after a long pause. "And—I love every man living because I—I love Oliver in the wonderful way I do,—and having been a fool myself," she said with conviction, "I know how to deal with fools."

So Mary went for the women, and in her immense interest in their husbands, and in their stories, she told them her own somehow, and the voyage in the end was not the terror it might have been.

Mrs. Mirrilies indeed looked as fresh when she landed as when she had embarked.

In the foetid heat of the train, however, her occupation behind her,—before her life or death,—Mary's mind fell from its temporary expansion, back amidst the little things that make life small, the little inevitable things of every day,—her own futile efforts amongst the rest.

All sorts of petty incidents she could have laughed at a week ago, dogged her mind, spoiling its elasticity. Little jealousies, little spites, little falsities encompassed her and led her captive. She seemed to have fallen into a pit of littlenesses. All the splendid possibilities her eyes had seen on shipboard were now far away, and to pit her puny strength against the invincible microscopical forces that had vanquished giants,—Oliver, for instance,—with the pot of abominations from which divorces are brewed being emptied this minute about his ears,—seemed nothing short of ridiculous.

It was a doubting and a fearful Mary who sat in that sultry compartment and looked down, not up. And this to be the reaction from her first really practical effort in altruism!

"I really did work like a horse," she said, peering up out of the pit, "once I started. All through the Red Sea I never gave in once. And yet I might just as well have lopped like the others.—I'll leave the world to improve itself, and just hold on tight to Oliver.

"My faith has apparently a hole in it. If I leave it alone, something may silt down and plug it and stop further waste. I must nail my mind to a simple thing like a man—a man—a man—that's just what Oliver is, —and it's everything."

This steadied Mary a little. Incessant occupation of an altruistic nature in the Red Sea tries the reins, and the birth of passion in a woman strong of body, brain, and spirit, leaves its mark.

When Mrs. Mirrilies without warning of letter or telegram, reached her station, she was sane again in a measure, —but she was changed. She was always changing now, it seemed, always in a state of flux, some nebulous creature never settling down into any mould, like jelly that won't jell. Like anything in the making that will never get made,—without something added.

She was as some being waiting in the mists of Creation's dawn for the magical touch of completion. Things had got beyond her. She would do nothing but hold on to Oliver. She had neither time nor strength to be tracking her own changes. They only mattered to Oliver, after all, and he could do his tracking for himself !

When she got out of the train she stood rather lost and helpless amongst her boxes. To be without any attendance at all in India, and with no one to meet you, was an experience curiously annihilating.

She had brought no maid from England on account of the season and her haste, and it had not struck her to engage one on landing. She had felt quite strong and uplifted enough then to face all the beasts in the jungle single-handed. But now it was another story.

The furtive inquiry behind commentless eyes, the suavely servile offers of service brought to Mary far-off echoes of the old ample, protected life :—a sense of loss,

of an irreparable loneliness, a lasting regret, fell upon Mary. The years that the locusts had eaten seemed to lift themselves from their graves and to gaze with dim reproachful eyes into hers.

The meanness in the quality of her return brought her folly home to Mary more than a thousand moral discourses would have done.

"The prodigal son with the fatted calf left out," said Mary to herself, as she looked after her luggage, "is a low-down rôle. I feel exactly like a microbe."

Fortunately, however, this sort of thing did not give Mrs. Mirrilies the usual hang-dog expression. The Mary who stood at last on the verandah, and inquired if the Sahib were at home, looked rather a wickedly dangerous young person. The butler, who was a Burmese and knew everything, was outraged and interested. He prevaricated.

"I am the wife of the Sahib Captain," said Mary with dignity.

It wasn't a convincing argument to this astute diplomat, but he salaamed more profoundly than before.—The Sahib Captain was not as other men, but he was still a man.

"I will see if perhaps the Sahib may have returned," he murmured, and glided silently into the gloom. And Mary, taking her courage in both hands, followed hot on his heels. . . .

She saw him the length of a dim room before he looked up. He was absorbed in his work, his brows were drawn together, he was thin and old.

* * * * *

"Hullo!" he said, dropping his pen, immovable on his seat; he recovered himself in a moment, got to his feet and nodded dismissal to his censor, fully satisfied now, yet with a sense of deprivation in his heart.

Mary took one step forward, then stood stock-still, trembling and shaken, a torment of trouble in her mute young face. This—his cool collected magnificent Mary!

"Mary!" he said incredulously, "Mary!"

It was a dream, a vision. He feared to dispel it. He put out his arms with a great yearning, but he did not dare to touch and take her.

He had been writing to her, a letter he had never meant to send. It was written with the blood of a man's heart. She would not understand it, but for the easing of a man's soul it had to be written.

And now this woman he had never known !

" But—but—won't you say you're glad ? " she cried out at last.

" Glad ! Glad ! My God ! What a word ! "

But yet he didn't take her. This was another woman. He didn't know her. There was a world of entreaty in Mary's beautiful eyes. She burst into a passion of silent sobs. Never in all his life had Oliver seen Mary cry. The woman he had known had not yet arrived either at tears or laughter.

He still stood as one bewitched, looking at her, and suddenly he saw her as she was.

Then he took her in his arms, and at last Mary knew. . . .

Hours or days or centuries had passed, and they were together on the verandah after dinner.

Mary vaguely remembered the coolness of her bath, and in a dream Oliver seemed to have fastened her things for her.

And there was Tea. She poured it out and gave Oliver no sugar. He had to remind her that he always took three lumps ! This wasn't vague at all. It had hurt her horribly. It hurt still.—It was in a way something that had come between them, some cold breath from those years that the locusts had eaten. Would the dull benumbing echo always be coming back ?

They had been trying to put things into words, the things that filled their hearts, that had to be said somehow—some time. There were lapses into silence. Little broken half-made sentences,—but words, after all, were superfluous. They were together, that was the one reality, and the one clear outstanding fact.

Oliver remembered, in bitter twinges, his own guilt

in regard to the girl he had sent out alone to her ordeal of fire. He knew nothing except that there was still much to be told. His own part could wait. It was there—part of him, for the rest of his life, part of his punishment perhaps. And he wanted no explanations from her now. Being a man, he said to himself, "That must be to-morrow, not to-night."

Women are different, however. It was the sorrow that gathered in Mary's dancing eyes when suddenly she remembered, the tightening of her hand on his, the quick sob in her laughter, that showed him that the matter must be dealt with now.

He wanted no assurance from Mary,—no explanations; nothing but Mary herself. She was his—his—his altogether. She had been shaken to her depths. In some way she had been revolutionized into a new creature,—and even if she had been outraged into this new consciousness?—for a single instant the fiery hand of sex held him as in a vice and shook the very soul out of him,—he was an animal at bay,—but at last he wrenched himself from the burning grip,—and was a man again.

Whatever had happened, it was *his* guilt, *his* shame. Her sin, if it were sin, was his sin. Her pain, his pain—and his also her condemnation.

And—and—what did it all matter? He had her. She was his. The woman he had chosen above them all. What did anything matter? He had her!

In any riddle of life no matter how solved, or when, or where, they were from henceforth indissolubly one.

As he had looked down at her before dinner in her sleep of sheer exhaustion, this woman above all women!—he had thought, watching the marvel of her face, that in some woman's way she had made the ultimate sacrifice, she had hurt herself as much as she could be hurt. She had surely hung, too, upon the Cross, else this resurrection could not have taken place.

And after this to want explanation or assurance!

And now—she?—couldn't she wait until to-morrow?

Then words would perhaps be no longer necessary—ever again. Couldn't she drop Hell into its own pit, and come right off into Heaven as a man would.

He looked at her and marvelled at the way in which women can heap pain upon pain,—in which it appears as though they must,—before pain will yield to them its full harvest of joy.

At any rate he saw clearly enough that she would speak,—and he must hear before the splendid moon was over the compound trees! He knew it by some light in her eyes. A laughing light, sorrowful beyond words, which compelled him to her will.

"Well, if you must, you must," he said, laughing too. "But we don't want explanations you and I,—and if they must be,—for myself, I'd rather explain to-morrow. I have plenty to explain. A jolly sight more than you.—No matter what happened, child, nothing matters now to us,—except what's before us,—and we're together to tackle that. But go on if you won't put it off until it's no longer necessary.—It's never been necessary!"

He looked at her eyes still laughing, still with all the ancient sorrows of women in them. It made her beauty almost unendurable.

"Ah! You won't," he muttered. "Well, then, go ahead, You're sure to want to speak first. Go ahead, child, and get it over."

She put her hand into his.

"Hold it tight," she said. "I can't say it all alone, and it's all got to be said."

The story of the birth of passion in the heart, of spirit in the soul, and of the eternal conflict between the two that had rent her being,—the desperate conflict that is fighting itself out in the whole world, bringing confusion, doubt and dismay to all—ruin and destruction to many—had refined itself down to such passionate simplicity in Mary's mind that it spoke itself in words aflame with all the profound and tragic simplicity of life.

She must have suffered irrevocably, this cool, collected, efficient creature of boundless courage and an ignorance

to make one shudder to have learnt what she had learnt, to have become what she now was.

And the shames and hidden hopes and disintegrating surprises of primeval passion to be put into words by this woman to whom passion had revealed both life and death !

Oliver sat frozen to his seat, powerless to help or protest. The thing was above and beyond words for this man,—for any man in whom sordid dreams, and the furies, and fears, and pangs of jealousy, and partial defeats, and hard-won victories had been at home for so many years, all part of the pain and the strife and the infinite glory of the common life of man.

It was told by Mary as the first woman might have told it. There was all the direct force, the splendid crudity, shorn of all superfluities and artificialities of experience in the story.

Some woman at breaking dawn seemed to look with wide-eyed amazement into the tragic strangeness of life.

Oliver let her speak on. He was powerless to prevent her, indeed, and his logical controlled wife merged into this superb sentient, chaotic creature, if a revelation of pain unspeakable, was yet entralling.

And as he looked and listened, absorbed and expectant, he found that this was no mere emotional outburst.

She was wild enough, primitive enough, more than once passionately emotional, but never once did she lose her head. She was consistently intelligent throughout, and as logical and reasonable as a beautiful woman need ever be, with a logic and reason all her own, of course, but that to a reasonable man is all-sufficient.

"Oh, it's true, true, true," said Mary. "I was as near being the usual idiot who gets divorced as I well could be.—And yet,—Oh ! Oliver,—it's more than idiocy. It's—it's immense, and it wants more than an idiot to stand up to it. I don't in the least wonder so many go under in the great surprise. And—and—what's come to us that it should be a great surprise? When it's part of us,—when—it's,—it must be nearly the biggest thing in life—the most invincible, the thing everyone of us ought to have

some part in,—that we're done out of our rights if we haven't. Oh! It's impossible to grasp it or to—to—understand—anything." She snatched her hand from his and hid her burning face.

"When do you propose to let me have my innings?" said Oliver gently in the long pause.

"When I've said one other thing," said Mary presently, lifting her head. "I feel a worm just this minute. It's the right attitude and it ought to endure, I suppose, but I feel quite certain it won't. After fighting wild beasts, even if you were fool enough to put yourself in their way, you can't be meek and submissive for very long at a time. You have fought and you have overcome, and it leaves a fierceness behind it.

"Oliver, if I had fought and hadn't overcome—only just found out,—and suffered for it ever after,—oh! Oliver, what would have happened?" She looked straight ahead of her but held on like a vice to his hand.

"Nothing," said Oliver. "Except that we'd both have had a hell of a time.—You're mine. You could never have belonged in reality, to any other man, and into whatever depths your folly had precipitated you, mine was the leader in the mad enterprise. I sent you out on a job too big for a woman who knew nothing."

"I ought to have known—with you."

"That you didn't was as much my fault as yours. I knew your strength and your weakness. I ought to have known *you*," he said gravely, "and made you know—know yourself, and all the rest of us. However—I didn't, and if you'd made an ultimate fool of yourself, we were fools together, that's all. And even then, what does it matter now?—to us, that is. Thank God for the boy's sake that you didn't. It would perhaps have spoilt even our life together for *you*."

They sat silent for a long time, wondering at their happiness and the madness of having risked it.

It was the woman, of course, who got back first to business. Oliver would have deferred it to a more convenient occasion, without a stain on his conscience.

"If the worst comes," she asked, "what will it mean?"

"Ruin," said Oliver quietly. "I must leave the Service."

"Yes," said Mary slowly, "and we'll be the laughing-stock of India. After my uppish attitude, my high looks and proud stomach."

"We'll be together," said Oliver. "But I haven't made *my* confession yet."

"Oh, Oliver, not now, not to-night,—as if it mattered! Oliver, I'm glad Barbara saved herself from being an—an ultimate idiot, that you didn't do it for her. But how on earth did she do it? and *you* the man?"

"By being Barbara. And I'm not irresistible, or we shouldn't be now in the hole we are."

"You are irresistible to Barbara and me,—Oliver, your going sick was her one chance. If you'd been well, she'd never have dared——"

"Don't be a woman."

"It isn't being a woman. It's common sense. Oh, well! she saved your life. It will be her one comfort in her loneliness."

"She needn't be lonely—if he——"

"He won't, and even if he did, do you think she'd bother with any other man after you? I'll go and see her to-morrow, and then we'll begin the battle of wits," she said, setting her teeth, "and we'll win."

"We have won already," said Oliver. "No matter what happens, we've won, hands down."

CHAPTER XXXV

AS was only to be expected, Barbara in this slashing blow to her development, had reverted to type. She did not sleep a wink, and when Mary came in she looked deplorable and cowered, and Mary felt like the ruthless avenger of melodrama.

This, however, was being as hopeless as Barbara herself, so she set her teeth, fell upon Barbara, and shook her.

"Barbara," she cried. "To look like that—to look as if you were afraid of *me*—of *me*, when it's up to you and me to save the situation. We're the forlorn hopes, and was ever in all the history of divorces so queer a coalition?"

Mary subsided on the sofa and began to laugh.

"Mary!" bleated Barbara.

"It's the only thing to do. Is Major Quayle at home?"

"No," said Barbara faintly.

"That's fortunate. He has a grim sense of humour, and would be sure to think that one of us had gone mad, so he'd score anyway."

"But, Mary—"

Barbara paused and tottered to her feet.

"Barbara! Sit down and stop shaking. It's I who ought to be shaking. That's not the sort of thing to convince a jury or anyone else. No one in the world but me who knows you, and knows Oliver, and knows myself,—I didn't when I went away—but I do now a little—would believe in your innocence if they could see you. Except perhaps Major Quayle. He's convinced of it, or he wouldn't have spent a fortune in corrupting the servants. Barbara,

think of all that depends upon your *looking* innocent and assured."

"I know—oh! I know. But that's just it. It's too much for a woman like me," she wailed.

"Nothing's too much for any woman who wants to help a man."

"And," said Barbara with blinking frightened eyes, "you,—I can't get accustomed to you,—you're different altogether."

"But we've all had enough to make us rather different."

"But so utterly different. One couldn't expect it."

Mary laughed.

"But what on earth's the matter? Don't I come up to your expectations? Oh! never mind! I'll improve as I go along. One can't think out the correct demeanour for a divorce on your own hearth at a moment's notice."

"I've always known it would come," said Barbara drearily, "directly Frank cared enough for one of them to marry her."

Mary's first impulse was to shake Barbara, and this time to some purpose, but the poor twitching, suffering face disarmed her.

"You mean to say you sat on the verandah when no one was there, and thought it all out,—that you've been thinking it out for years?"

"Yes," said Barbara simply. "One had to. And now to have it come true, and the man to be, oh,—Captain Mirrilies!"

"Call him Oliver," said Mary gently. "You saved his life. And, Barbara—if I didn't laugh I could never do my best for Oliver,—for both my Olivers. And you'll have to laugh too, before we win."

Barbara's face was in her hands.

"Well,—not laugh," said Mary after a depressed glance. "I don't think your conscience could stand that; mine's tougher, you know. But you could, at least, look calm and usual. And—oh, Barbara, couldn't you do your hair properly, and not get your frocks crumpled?"

"Am I dreadful?" said Barbara, sitting up with some

show of alacrity. "And—and I'd begun to dress rather decently."

"So Oliver said," said Mary dryly. "How long would you be changing, Barbara?"

"Not ten minutes," said Barbara, who was already making for the door to escape from Mary, and to prepare to meet her.

"Sex is the terror of terrors," said Mary with a grim mouth. "To think it was *that* that nearly spoilt everything!"

She walked restlessly up and down the long room, full of the outward and visible signs of Barbara. She looked half-amused at her books,—more closely and curiously at one corner bookcase glowing in white paint.

"These herald in a new era," said Mary. "The others belong to the pre-Oliver period. I wonder how much she understood of these, or how much he explained. No one can explain like Oliver! and—oh!"

She threw up her head and turned her back on the bookcase.

"What does it all matter now anyway? Barbara or the books or—. After all," she concluded with brows slightly knit, "it was I, not Barbara,—To put a lion at the mercy of a mouse and then to be blaming the mouse, it's just like Barbara!"

"I'd give my very eyes to get inside Oliver," she said presently with a small chuckle, "and to see Barbara as he did,—but the twinniest of twin souls could never do that! It's the one thing that will make the final union of the two sexes in one transcendent being, the one utter impossibility.

"Oh, well—it's fortunate perhaps for the Barbaras of this world," said Mary with a superb air. She was still on her perch when Barbara came in, and immensely kind. Barbara felt more crushed than ever, and wondered if the new way of doing her hair was wrong also. Obsessed by this horrible conviction, Barbara became so impossible that Mary had to forget herself at last, and to remember Barbara and then things went better.

Barbara was as truthful, with all her terrors, as a child who has never been frightened.

"Do you really think that the servants' evidence is of such crucial importance?" Mary inquired, after listening patiently to a bleak, scrupulously accurate statement of tiny facts, as irritating, and as impossible to evade, as midges. Barbara's profound and terrified belief in their significance was evident enough.

"Frank thinks it is," she faltered. "And so does Captain—does Oliver."

"Oh," said Mary.

Barbara flushed painfully, but forged on with dauntless assiduity.

"When he was very ill he only wanted me. He thought I was you." . . .

All the powers of Heaven couldn't silence a slight mutinous gurgle in Mary's throat. This heightened Barbara's colour, but it did not silence her.

"He held my hand all the time and would take nothing except from me,—and,—and—I only thought of him then. When I thought he was dying," she said under her held breath, "I neither know what I did, nor what I said. And afterwards he was dazed for days and days. He only knew at—intervals."

"And even when he was better," she said, "there was no one else, and he had to have someone, and I was always there. And,—you know probably how Frank was always asking him in,—and he always left us alone in the end, and there were eyes and ears everywhere. And,—he talked so much of you and little Oliver,—and—and then his face changed," she said in a low voice, "and his voice."

It was at that moment that Mary saw Barbara as Oliver had seen her, even though still with the inevitable difference.

"There's plenty of evidence, I think. And the Station too did talk in the end, it would you know."

"Barbara," said Mary gently, "you're a good woman, and I'm glad you're my friend and Oliver's. Don't you

think it would be rather a good plan if we went together to the Club this afternoon, just as we used to go ? ”

“ I—I never go now.”

“ That’s just it. You ought to.”

“ No one would have bothered about me but,—but Oliver,” said Barbara with a heroic effort.

“ Oh, Barbara, how right you are often ! Much righter than me. But now it’s different. We’ll both be banned now in a way, you and I, and we’ll bother about each other, under Major Quayle’s very nose. Barbara, you poor thing ! ” she said suddenly, “ I wonder if it would be better for you if you cared for him still.”

“ I cared for him for long long years,” said Barbara slowly, “ and it made no difference to either of us. Living with a man who is wishing you dead all the time somehow deadens everything in you. It’s like a slow poison, I think.”

Mary sat silent. She had no words for this poor woman. Even the happiness in her own heart seemed an outrage upon so defenceless a creature whose one power, the power to love, had become her curse,—and her salvation. Mary knew too much of love now, not to know this, but it was only sorry consolation as she went slowly home, leaving behind her a life bereft of hope, and pierced to the soul by memory.

“ I don’t care,” said Mary. “ I’ll see to it that she gets all the painful enjoyment out of Oliver that’s possible in the circumstances.”

“ Oliver ! ” she said after luncheon, “ it’s going to be the queerest coalition that ever was, but Barbara’s got to come into it. She belongs nowhere now, she’s like Mahomet’s coffin hanging in mid air. She must be permanently nailed to some earthly fixture, and we’re her only chance.”

Mary set forth her plans.

“ There’s a touch of comic opera in the arrangement, don’t you think ? ” said Oliver.

“ That’s inevitable. But what’s one to do ? We can’t leave her floating round for ever, without even a

fellow sinner in tow. She must simply be made to forget her follies and stiffen into shape again. I wish Major Quayle wouldn't have the pleasure of grinning under his breath at us. Barbara, fortunately perhaps, won't see the obnoxious humour in the affair."

"Major Quayle will have a certain diffidence in coming to the Club just now."

"He'll overcome it, on occasion, when I appear on the scene. You would yourself, Oliver, in his case. Oh ! you know you would. It adds a piquant interest to a harassed life.—Major Quayle's anxieties must be acute just now.—Barbara has always known he'd work Heaven and earth to divorce her as soon as he cared enough for 'one of them' to marry her !

"Oh ! Oliver, to have dragged us all into this pit of slime !—You like to believe that we did it together, you and I—you would, you darling ! but *I* feel the only sinner in the whole sordid business. It was want of love that got us into the pit, while it's love that's plunged in Barbara and Major Quayle,—and the worst love is better than none at all.—I detest all negations, Oliver !—If you'll love Barbara,—well, like a step-sister, you'll really oblige me.—Oh ! Oliver, it's such a pit of slimy sorrow we've all got into. There's that other woman too,—Major Quayle can be entralling enough when he likes. I daresay she adores him. It's the most incomprehensible world I ever struck, and all the swelling words of vanity in all the books only make it worse. I wish Oliver the Less and the boys were here. None of them know anything, and so they might tell us something."

"They've told you a great deal, quite enough for the present. I'm on the whole glad," said Oliver, laughing, "that you learnt it all from boys."

CHAPTER XXXVI

IT was an entralling delight to Oliver to sit silent and let Mary reveal the self he had never known. His former silent vigils had been chiefly occupied in marvelling at the barrenness of so promising a soil. At the bondage to limitations of so potentially limitless a being. Above all at the calm complacency with which she hugged her chains, and refused to permit any part of her to burst into bloom. The flowing in now of a rich mixed fullness of life to fill the vacant depths he had known with such bitter thoroughness, became an absorbing pursuit, Oliver could have watched for ever had there not been more urgent affairs afoot.

As for the others, Mary's sudden descent had naturally the effect of an earthquake upon the Community.

Directly she left her cards visitors poured in upon her, and her frank and commentless acceptance of the situation, as though a divorce, howsoever grave and deplorable, were as everyday an event as typhoid, took away their breath.

There was in her demeanour a want of the usual furtive approaches to these unsavoury occurrences when they came close home, that gave pause to the observant.

There were even symptoms of some secret amusement underlying the calm exterior of Mrs. Mirrilies that produced head-shakings on the part of the more thoughtful. They could not quite understand the attitude, and Mrs. Mirrilies did not trouble to explain it.

Those who did not know Mary, knew all about her, and

it is natural to the feminine mind to condemn that which it does not understand.

As for the men they never were so relieved in the whole course of their lives. They had waited with bated breath to ascertain how Mrs. Mirrilies, of all people in the world, would take this. They could not, even those who only knew her from report, imagine her in such a rôle. She confounded the imagination of simple men.

They were positively grateful to her for the stand she took. It relieved them of no end of embarrassment, for somewhere amidst the chaos of reticences, meannesses, disloyalties, and other unpleasant human traits inseparable from divorces there lurked a laugh that matched their own, an honest laugh untouched of levity. They felt in their bones that if she saw as well or better than they could, the clotted vileness in Major Quayle's method of making-for-righteousness, she saw also nearly as clearly as they, all its sinister humour.

This made a great bond between them.

Mary had more ardent well-wishers all agog to help than even she suspected.

The situation however, was about as grave and ominous as it well could be. Major Quayle was apparently a genius in these matters, and there did not seem to be a loophole of escape for any of his victims. Barbara's diary, of which he had got hold, and her wild folly during Oliver's illness and afterwards, seemed hopeless obstacles to a successful defence, and Major Quayle could easily disprove any plea of collusion.

Oliver had insisted from the beginning upon the trial's taking place in England. Major Quayle's resistance caused delays and difficulties. The trial could not take place until after the summer vacation, and Oliver was working double time to get his work ready to hand over to a substitute, while the Bishop and his wife, ably lead by Peter Turton, were getting things in train at the other side.

The outlook however was very black for all of them. To keep Barbara decently upright alone was a big business.

"Oliver!" said Mary one day in utter despair, "do you think our consciences would ever let us alone if we persuaded her that her highest duty was to go home?"

"Yours wouldn't,—and then you'd never let *me* alone."

"She'll have to stay then. I thought better of your conscience, Oliver."

"Try Barbara with a few whiskies," said Oliver. "She drinks too much tea."

"If women who really want Dutch courage aren't habituals," snapped Mary, "they always do drink too much tea. They have you in every way, those people! It would be delightful and exhilarating to apply whiskies to Barbara, but moral suasion is another story. You hate doing it when she has nothing, and you everything. The only application that would be really effective, whisky being taboo, is *you*—and *you*—Oh, well—you're taboo too. It's all a bit too big for Barbara. It's getting a bit too big for all of us it seems," said Mary, "but I quite agree with you—Barbara's utterly and entirely out of place but it would be simply awful if we let her feel it."

"She never can feel the worm I do anyway," said Oliver. "There are a thousand excuses for women, saints, and sinners, but there are none for deliberate fools. I ought to have got her to go home months ago."

"As though she'd have moved an inch."

"Yes she would, if I'd applied the right pressure to her conscience."

"Oliver! Oliver! We can't afford to go back either of us. We've just got to go on somehow, with Barbara in tow."

"Then she's got to be attached in such a way as not to be a skid upon your every step forward, child. This is a relapse. She had bucked up in an astonishing way."

"Well, naturally under the one stimulus she needed. I'm the reason of the relapse, the arrest to Barbara's development, and I hate it. One hates to hurt things like Barbara that have been hurt so much already. One ought to be big enough not to. It's awful to have nothing

and never to have had anything—She's done a bigger thing than I've done, Oliver,—I'd never have given you up,—if I'd had one ghost of a chance of keeping you, and you know she has. Barbara has done one big thing, and yet even that's spoilt. It's humiliated her instead of uplifting her. Everything seems to happen like that for Barbara. Everything's spoilt for her. I'd give anything if she could do just one great thing of which she and all of us could be proud for our whole lives. Anyway, Oliver, do hypnotize her into not being afraid to talk to you before me."

"Wouldn't that be to hypnotize her into something finer than Barbara?"

"What's the matter with you, Oliver? No it wouldn't. Barbara's already much finer than Barbara—in—an invisible sort of way that you ought to have seen. But how could she help it, having been so much with you?"

"Oh! for Heaven's sake—"

"Turn round your face Oliver, so that I can see it in that shaft of moonshine—You look so frank and open, Oliver," she said slowly, "and yet I know so little of you really. I believe Barbara knows more."

"Does she?"

"She does, I do believe, and that's why she cringes before me. There's always something in everything to make Barbara cringe, to humiliate her. If she did the greatest thing in the world, there'd be a cringe in it, I believe,—a miserable sort of bleeding apology."

"Look here,—you've got Barbara on your nerves."

"I wish to goodness I could feel for five minutes,—not a minute longer,—just exactly how you feel about being the disputed territory of two such women as Barbara and me."

"I feel damnable," said Oliver. "I never felt such an ass in my life. A man with an ounce of brains in his head to have got us all into this mess!"

"Oliver,—no more of that! We're never going back any more, never, never, never! What you've got to do is to get us all out of the mess. I came back intending to do it all myself, it's only suddenly struck me:—it's the usual

thing. It's not standing together properly with our feet planted just as they should be,—yours one little inch in advance, just as a symbol of the leader, the eternal Leader with no beginning and no end. Until this very instant I've been wanting to lead myself. Did you know it, Oliver ? ”

“ Oh, well, yes. I know *you* ! ” said Oliver, laughing.

“ Oh, no, you don't. Not till we get into our exact proper places. Why didn't you *put* me there, Oliver ? ”

“ Jostle for first place ?—I ? Perhaps tread on your toes ? ”

“ There's no first place and no last really. It's only the way we stand, and look out at the world,” said Mary, “ that makes all the difference. It makes us more one than ever, and it gives us the power of two. Of some Eternal two, I think,” she said slowly, “ that can do everything and will make us invincible,—later on when we've got into our stride.”

They sat silent and Oliver watched her eyes, seeing strange new things stealing out of them one by one. He dared not look ahead. To look back was only to convict himself of folly,—to overweight himself with regret, while nothing past or present or future could rob him of the things he saw in Mary's eyes only just beginning to speak out.

“ We're in such a hole as never was,” she said at last. “ The servants are corrupted beyond redemption. The law is out of joint.—Anyway, it's not Justice.—Major Quayle has the devil at his back and enough money to ship home a cloud of witnesses. Nothing could be worse. But we'll win through, Oliver,—somehow,—for now we're properly placed in the Eternal bond,—we were a little dislocated before.—And oh ! Oliver ! Marriage is the marvel of all marvels, and I've only just found it out ! And—we won't think any more of doubt, or fear, or ever again be bored by Barbara. And—the impossible will come to pass ! ”

“ It *has* come to pass,” said Oliver.

“ Did you know all this before I did, Oliver ? ”

"I knew it—in moments,—alone on the hills, or when things went badly,—I knew it in a useless theoretical way. You've put it into form,—made it the central power of our life, the power that will bring us through everything."

"Oliver, to-morrow we'll go for a long, long ride. It will be our first day out together. And the ridiculous impossible thing that's going to save us, will be coming nearer ! nearer ! nearer ! the whole time."

CHAPTER XXXVII

FROM that day there came a change over Barbara. She grew whiter and whiter, more fragile, and commentless in regard to that which faced them all. She lifted up her willowy bowed back, however, dressed better than Mary could have believed possible, and had her hair done well.

More than that, she bore herself beyond reproach in the eye of the public. There was a quiet force in Barbara now, a gentle dignity that made Mary watch her with curious interest. There was also an arresting fineness in the frank eager way in which she showed her affection for Mary and her husband, and her simple gratitude for their countenance and protection that must have moved and touched people very much less her friends than were the Mirrilies'.

Never in all her life had Barbara been more lovable, more sweet and attractive. There was a pleading youthful appeal in her pretty eyes, and sometimes she clung to Mary as though to fortify her weakness with the other's strength for some great enterprise.

There was plainly some project afoot in Barbara's mind, and Mary felt certain that it was something very big, so big that Barbara was recoiling from the shock of it, and yet resolutely bracing herself to face it boldly.

In every unspoken unintrusive way she could, Mary tried to help Barbara to her adventure. It seemed to her so splendid that Barbara should bring something through triumphantly, something really big. It would change everything for Barbara, and it would be a most exhilarating joy for her and Oliver to be able to clap her with all their hearts for the deed,—whatsoever it might be.

That was Barbara's affair. Mary was naturally dying of curiosity, but it would never even have struck her to probe or pry. That would have hurt Barbara in so many ways, besides taking away from her the joy and the glory of doing the big thing all by herself, and telling everything in the end in her own words.

* * * * *

It was a time of profound anxiety and dire forebodings for everyone. Echoes of things greater and more ominous than those that oppress or elate little isolated mortals hung heavy in the air. Men went silent through the streets. Once again the menace of the Balkans had lifted up its sinister head, and this time the teeth of the future were set. The minds of men looked in tense expectation towards the East.

And then, in the very moment when a moment's delay had become intolerable, some wires far down the Line were mysteriously cut and no news reached the Station at all.

The very day this happened there came an urgent message calling Oliver away upon a day's journey into the jungle. There was trouble with the coolies; he had to go. But with mutterings of doom for all the nations in the air, those in the Station knew no more than the man in the wilderness. The inexplicable delay continued.

During this time of waiting and horror, it was a relief to Mary to watch Barbara still quietly absorbed in her own secret enterprise. So profoundly and utterly did it absorb her that she had no eyes even to see the tribulation that was coming upon the earth.

When Oliver returned six hours before he could be reasonably expected worn out with his wild ride, sick with fretting anxiety, to turn his thoughts to something else, Mary had been telling him all about Barbara.

"I should have gone crazy those two awful days without you," she said, "if I hadn't had Barbara to watch. It's been so curious. I believe she simply made up her mind that I should know her down to the ground,—and she's been showing herself to me. And now I believe I do know

her. I'm sure I do,—in a way. The one thing that still puzzles me is her not standing waiting almost breathless as we all are,—not knowing that something”—Mary paused with shining eyes—“something stupendous is coming, and that we're all fetched up short,—to,—to face—the—impossible.”

She spoke in little jerks in an odd voice.

“And yet I think,” she said at last, “perhaps that I understand even this part of Barbara just a little. What's in Barbara's mind fills it up to the brim,—is as big as the world to Barbara, it is the world, and completely blocks the view. She can see nothing else, I suppose. It's Barbara's first great adventure and even if the news doesn't come for hours yet, and we can't bear much more,” she paused, and Oliver saw that there were tears in her eyes—“let us wish her good luck. Poor Barbara! I never knew till now how much I care for Barbara,” she said, rubbing her eyes against Oliver's sleeve. “And if you had,—oh! you know,—I couldn't blame you. It could never be utterly and entirely idiotic again.”

“Nothing will ever take the utter idiocy out of the thing, or the bitter regret,” said Oliver. “But I'm glad we agree about Barbara, dear. And I'm glad she knows it. She will never have a doubt of either of us again, and you've done that, Mary. It's a pretty big thing to do really, you know—”

“Oh! Oliver! the papers!”

She sprang to get hold of them first, and together they skimmed them, holding their breath.

“It's war,” said Oliver, “war at last.” For a minute or two he stood with knitted brows and a bowed head, silent.

“We ought to be in it,” he said at last, in a harsh, strained voice. “That's clear enough—and with this Government! My God! that men like those over there should be holding our honour in their greased palms.”

He threw up his head, and upon Oliver's face there shone such a light as Mary had never yet seen, familiar as she was to grow with it in the tragedy of the later days.

“But—but—we're not prepared!” she gasped.

"Prepared? Was England ever prepared? We're as much prepared as we ever shall be. France has been forced into this and we can't stand by and see her go under. We can't sneak out of this with a whole skin. And with those fellows at the helm!——"

He sat down to pore again over the papers.

"This war will be a sappers' war—our war."

"But, Oliver—there's Belgium——"

"Do you think that Belgium or any other obstacle will stop Germany's way to the sea? Did anyone in his senses ever believe in the honour of Germany where the objective she's been concentrating herself on for forty odd years is concerned?"

"There are so many women in the world," said Mary presently.

"This war is theirs as much as ours," said Oliver. "It's what had to come. It's none of our making, and women as little as men will want to sit tight and desert a friend. The only people in the Empire who'd care to do that is the blighted Government."

"But—they daren't," he said, after another long silence. "By God! They daren't. There's honour still in England. England, thank Heaven, isn't the Government. We're only surface-rotten, Mary, ankle-deep in corruption,—an affection of the feet—and a war will save us. Bad as we are, if it's right to fight we'll fight, Government or no Government."

"Oh! Oliver! Oliver——!"

Mary stood up to her full height and her face shone.

Amongst a multitude of other serious things Mary had once been a pacifist, and used to thank her stars that she had married into the Scientific Corps. Now the soldier in her sprang armed *cap à pie* to meet his mate in Oliver.

The two bent again to see, if by any chance, they could have missed any word of news.

"And only a week or so ago I hated to look at a paper," said Mary, with a tremulous laugh. "There was nothing but that horrible Caillaux trial, dragging France—so splendid and royal,—in the mud."

"That's all over and done with, anyway. From now on, France and ourselves will have other fish to fry."

"The whole world is changed in one little moment," said Mary softly, all her face aglow. "Nothing that mattered—everything—matters any more now,—not even Divorces, or Barbara's little feelings, or mine. Your career doesn't matter, Oliver, and I don't believe Oliver the Less does very much. Nothing matters in the very least except that England shall play the game."

Oliver laughed softly.

"And I remember the time——"

"To dare to remember anything but England now ! Oh, Oliver ! I wish I could pray."

"You can, dear. We all can at a pinch. It's all we can do now."

"Oh ! Come out into the night !" she said.

They stood together a long, long time in the soft gloom. The moon had sailed away over the low hills. The stars hung lucent in the velvet sky. The silence grew more intense because of the myriad silver sounds of the Indian night. The verandah grew intolerable. It seemed to isolate them, to shut them in,—to bar them from some great whole, of which they knew themselves to be very part and substance. Some invincible force which in that moment surged through every heart around the Seven Seas, and in the end must save England from her greatest crime.

They went instinctively hand in hand down the scented garden, past the great clumps of bushes starred with flowers, across the silver ribbon of a road, out upon the parched plain.

Here they stood motionless, and as they stood in the solemn hush of the Great Land held by a tiny handful of men,—blood-brothers to them,—the soul of the little nation that does these things, and yet remains foolish, revealed itself to them.

They stood in the midst of it, and saw. They stood in the midst of the innumerable company of those who had gone before, and would follow after, who had died or were ready to die that England might live.

A curious little panting sound coming to them from the road struck in the same moment upon their rapt senses. With a sigh they turned to go home.

"Oh, Oliver," said Mary, with bowed head, seeing nothing now, and stumbling a little, "we've said our prayers together for the very first time, and I think that God has heard us.

"England can't disgrace herself," she cried, with sudden intense passion, "while we're alive. We're just ordinary people exactly like all the other millions scattered over the 'map that is half unrolled,' and we're all feeling like this,—and it's praying and, and,—God will hear. Oh! He simply must!"

* * * * *

A little ghost-like creature came with a curious fluttering movement, as though skimming the ground across the arid dryness of the plain.

"It's—it's Barbara's Ayah," said Mary, peering closer.

"Come! Come! Come!" cried the woman, and fell gasping at their feet.

Oliver caught her up, a thing as light as a moth.

"Run for all you're worth," he said. "I'll give her to her own people, telephone for the doctor, and catch you up."

Mary ran quickly, but Oliver more quickly still. He soon caught her up and lifted her over the ground. They were soon there.

Barbara in a pretty new frock, neat and unruffled, was lying back in her chair, as she had so often lain before. She was no whiter than she had often been of late, but she was beautiful, which she had never been before.

There was no trace or sign of melodrama anywhere.

The book she had been reading was in her lap, the lamp at just the right angle for her eyes. It was heart-failure in every detail. No one could ever possibly attribute it to anything else. She had always had a weak heart and they all knew it.

Barbara had brought through her first great adventure triumphantly.

No one would ever have known anything,—had each one not known too well !

“ And now,” said Mary in a choked voice, “ now, when the whole world is changed. If she’d waited. If only she’d waited ! Oh, Oliver ! Why didn’t this ever once strike either of us ? ”

“ Quayle,” he said dully. “ Someone must fetch him.”

“ The Major Sahib is already here,” said the shivering Butler.

He came in and stood above her, stiff and rigid, a paper clenched in his fist.

“ And—now—now——” he muttered in Mary’s very words—“ when it’s all changed,—oh ! my God ! ”

“ Leave me with her all of you for a minute or so,” said the doctor.

The doctor knew too. Since she had nursed Captain Mirrilies for him he had been immensely sorry for the poor little woman, and in a clumsy, silent way he had been very kind to her. He had seen much sorrow, but none quite so helpless as that of this woman without hope.

And now, in agonized defiance of her conscience, she had given her little all.

He shook his head solemnly, and with strong disapproval, and went about his duties in his heavy, methodical way.

“ She’s done her job well,” he said,—“ no trace of anything. Got something from some native, of course, and that’s why she came to me,—just ten days ago, complaining of shortness of breath. I gave her something, too,—but——”

He whistled under his breath. “ Oh well, I won’t betray her now, poor child. One lie breeds many, that’s the worst of lies,” he sighed.—He was a serious Presbyterian and hated lies. “ I hope I’ll tell mine in the right way. She trusted me.—I’ll do my best.”

“ She must have been dead some ten or fifteen minutes,” he said stolidly. “ It’s heart failure. I have, as you know, Major Quayle, been always anxious about Mrs. Quayle’s heart.”

The doctor went out looking horribly ashamed of himself.

The two men and the woman stood together in a dreadful silence, and presently an orderly, who made as though he saw nothing, handed Oliver a paper.

"It's war, and we're in it," said Oliver under his breath.
"We're recalled!"

Quayle started, opened his fist and looked with dull, glazed eyes at the crumpled paper in it.

"So are we," he said foolishly, in a thin, spent voice.

"She did what she could for all of us. She died for her friends," said Mary, with bowed head. "Barbara's the first of you all to sacrifice herself for what seemed big enough to her."

Major Quayle looked at her, and his clouded brain seemed to clear.

"She needn't have done it," he said in a voice more like his own. "I knew that at once.—It's all changed."

"Ah! Everything always came too late for Barbara. Everything always went wrong for her." Mary's eyes were far away. She was white and trembling. "Barbara's been hurt too much," she said. "And this has hurt her more than all the rest. It has hurt her more than it could ever have hurt any other woman."

"No one knows but me how much it hurt Barbara to square her conscience," she said softly and simply, "because it would have hurt me in just the same way, I think."

Mary was unaware of her bitter cruelty to the man who had hurt Barbara too much, but Oliver, being a man, and knowing the weakness and the folly of man, and the price that shall nevertheless be exacted from him, paused as he went out, and gripped Quayle's hand.

"Look here, Quayle," he said, "there's England still."

THE END

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